

Self-Sacrifice in the Qur'an's Moral Teachings

**Would that there had been more people with a vestige
of good among the generations of those who came
before you, who forbade corruption in the land,
other than the few among them whom We saved.
Those who did wrong gladly pursued the life of luxury
that they were given and were evildoers.
(Surah Hud: 116)**

HARUN YAHYA

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Translated by: Ron Evans
Edited by: Jay Willoughby

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Abbreviation used:

(saas-sall-Allahu 'alyahi wa sallam): May Allah bless him and grant him peace
(following a reference to Prophet Muhammad)
(as-'alayhi's-salam): Peace be upon him (following a reference to the prophets)
(ra-radhi Allahu anhu / anha): May Allah be pleased with him / her (following a
reference to the Companions of the Prophet [saas])

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By
Millat Book Centre
A-34, Mount Kailash
New Delhi - 110065 (India)
Ph. : 3282740, 3274339, 3257949
Fax: 3263567, 3258147
email: sgagan@nde.vsnl.net.in

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The Deception of Evolution

To the Reader

A special chapter is assigned to the collapse of the theory of evolution because this theory constitutes the basis of all anti-spiritual philosophies. Since Darwinism rejects the fact of creation—and therefore, Allah's existence—over the last 140 years it has caused many people to abandon their faith or fall into doubt. It is therefore an imperative service, a very important duty to show everyone that this theory is a deception. Since some readers may find the chance to read only one of our books, we think it appropriate to devote a chapter to summarize this subject.

All the author's books explain faith-related issues in light of Qur'anic verses, and invite readers to learn Allah's words and to live by them. All the subjects concerning Allah's verses are explained so as to leave no doubt or room for questions in the reader's mind. The books' sincere, plain, and fluent style ensures that everyone of every age and from every social group can easily understand them. Thanks to their effective, lucid narrative, they can be read at one sitting. Even those who rigorously reject spirituality are influenced by the facts these books document and cannot refute the truthfulness of their contents.

This and all the other books by the author can be read individually, or discussed in a group. Readers eager to profit from the books will find discussion very useful, letting them relate their reflections and experiences to one another.

In addition, it will be a great service to Islam to contribute to the publication and reading of these books, written solely for the pleasure of Allah. The author's books are all extremely convincing. For this reason, to communicate true religion to others, one of the most effective methods is encouraging them to read these books.

We hope the reader will look through the reviews of his other books at the back of this book. His rich source material on faith-related issues is very useful, and a pleasure to read.

In these books, unlike some other books, you will not find the author's personal views, explanations based on dubious sources, styles that are unobservant of the respect and reverence due to sacred subjects, nor hopeless, pessimistic arguments that create doubts in the mind and deviations in the heart.

About the Author

Now writing under the pen-name of HARUN YAHYA, he was born in Ankara in 1956. Having completed his primary and secondary education in Ankara, he studied arts at Istanbul's Mimar Sinan University and philosophy at Istanbul University. Since the 1980s, he has published many books on political, scientific, and faith-related issues. Harun Yahya is well-known as the author of important works disclosing the imposture of evolutionists, their invalid claims, and the dark liaisons between Darwinism and such bloody ideologies as fascism and communism.

Harun Yahya's works, translated into 57 different languages, constitute a collection for a total of more than 45,000 pages with 30,000 illustrations.

His pen-name is a composite of the names Harun and Yahya, in memory of the two esteemed prophets who fought against their peoples' lack of faith. The Prophet's seal on his books' covers is symbolic and is linked to their contents. It represents the Qur'an (the Final Scripture) and Prophet Muhammad (saas), last of the prophets. Under the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (teachings of the Prophet [saas]), the author makes it his purpose to disprove each fundamental tenet of godless ideologies and to have the "last word," so as to completely silence the objections raised against religion. He uses the seal of the final Prophet (saas), who attained ultimate wisdom and moral perfection, as a sign of his intention to offer the last word.

All of Harun Yahya's works share one single goal: to convey the Qur'an's message, encourage readers to consider basic faith-related issues such as Allah's existence and unity and the Hereafter; and to expose godless systems' feeble foundations and perverted ideologies.

Harun Yahya enjoys a wide readership in many countries, from India to America, England to Indonesia, Poland to Bosnia, Spain to Brazil, Malaysia to Italy, France to Bulgaria and Russia. Some of his books are available in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Urdu, Arabic, Albanian, Chinese, Swahili, Hausa, Dhivehi (spoken in Mauritius), Russian, Serbo-Croat (Bosnian), Polish, Malay, Uygur Turkish, Indonesian, Bengali, Danish and Swedish.

Greatly appreciated all around the world, these works have been instrumental in many people recovering faith in Allah and gaining deeper insights into their faith. His books' wisdom and sincerity, together with a distinct style that's easy to understand, directly affect anyone who reads them. Those who seriously consider these books, can no longer advocate atheism or any other perverted ideology or materialistic philosophy, since these books are characterized by rapid effectiveness, definite results, and irrefutability. Even if they continue to do so, it will be only a sentimental insistence, since these books refute such ideologies from their very foundations. All contemporary

movements of denial are now ideologically defeated, thanks to the books written by Harun Yahya.

This is no doubt a result of the Qur'an's wisdom and lucidity. The author modestly intends to serve as a means in humanity's search for Allah's right path. No material gain is sought in the publication of these works.

Those who encourage others to read these books, to open their minds and hearts and guide them to become more devoted servants of Allah, render an invaluable service.

Meanwhile, it would only be a waste of time and energy to propagate other books that create confusion in people's minds, lead them into ideological chaos, and that clearly have no strong and precise effects in removing the doubts in people's hearts, as also verified from previous experience. It is impossible for books devised to emphasize the author's literary power rather than the noble goal of saving people from loss of faith, to have such a great effect. Those who doubt this can readily see that the sole aim of Harun Yahya's books is to overcome disbelief and to disseminate the Qur'an's moral values. The success and impact of this service are manifested in the readers' conviction.

One point should be kept in mind: The main reason for the continuing cruelty, conflict, and other ordeals endured by the vast majority of people is the ideological prevalence of disbelief. This can be ended only with the ideological defeat of disbelief and by conveying the wonders of creation and Qur'anic morality so that people can live by it. Considering the state of the world today, leading into a downward spiral of violence, corruption and conflict, clearly this service must be provided speedily and effectively, or it may be too late.

In this effort, the books of Harun Yahya assume a leading role. By the will of Allah, these books will be a means through which people in the twenty-first century will attain the peace, justice, and happiness promised in the Qur'an.

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an reveals a very important truth: **"You will not attain true goodness until you give of what you love."** (Surah Al 'Imran: 92)

Self-sacrifice, one of the basic moral qualities that allows people to attain real goodness, can enable individuals to give up, happily and without a second thought, all that they own, love, and value. When necessary, they will endure every difficulty and exert all of their energy for the sake of their values and loved ones. When faced with choosing between their own advantage and that of their loved ones, they will forego their own benefit and make the greatest physical and emotional sacrifice that they can for their loved ones.

All people are created with negative moral tendencies that direct them toward selfishness and egotism. If one's lower self is not trained, this selfishness will take control of one's moral character. Generally, such people think first - or even exclusively - about themselves. They always want the best of everything and expect to be treated with understanding and kindness. When difficulties arise, they expect others to take risks for them and support them at the cost of their own advantage. They always want to protect their own interests and comfort. When faced with adversity, they renounce whatever they value for the sake of protecting their interests and avoiding any harm to themselves. Allah describes the extent of this selfish passion:

Truly humanity was created headstrong - desperate when bad things happen, begrudging when good things come. (Surat al-Ma'arij: 19-21)

People can overcome their lower self by understanding belief in Allah and practicing the Qur'an's moral teachings. Those who grasp the truths revealed in the Qur'an and understand the morality that Allah has laid down for humanity are always able to sacrifice for others. Allah says that those who master their lower self will attain salvation in this world and the Hereafter: **"The people who are protected from the avarice of their own selves are successful"** (Surat at-Taghabun: 16).

Allah created the human conscience to help people avoid evil and practice the morality that pleases Him. The conscience always warns against evil and shows the way to goodness. The deep love for Allah and strong fear and respect for Him that reside in the believers' heart prevent them from being overcome by their lower self. They know that the main reasons for their existence are to win Allah's favor and to conduct themselves in ways that earn His good pleasure. They know that this earthly life is very short and that they have to work to attain success in the Hereafter. They do not forget that all of this world's benefits are transitory and that one day they will stand in Allah's presence and account for their life. They are aware that those who pursue their own

interests here, instead of trying to attain Allah's favor, mercy, and Paradise, will suffer eternal agony. In addition, they know that Allah will reward their self-sacrificial moral character with good things in this world and incomparable eternal blessings in the Hereafter:

Those who do good will have the best, and more. Neither dust nor debasement will darken their faces. They are the Companions of the Garden, remaining in it timelessly, forever. (Surah Yunus: 26)

So Allah gave them the reward of this world and the best reward of the Hereafter. Allah loves good-doers. (Surah Al 'Imran: 148)

If anyone desires the reward of this world, We will give him some of it. If anyone desires the reward of the Hereafter, We will give him some of it. We will recompense the thankful. (Surah Al 'Imran: 145)

However, self-sacrifice is far more than just giving part of one's possessions to someone in need. For believers, it is a way of life that comes from the strength of their belief, pervades their whole life, and requires that they sensitize themselves to their surroundings. This involves feeling a sense of personal responsibility for social problems and trying to solve the problems of oppressed and needy people. Rather than thinking that the rich and powerful will take care of these problems, they consider it a moral imperative and a demand of their conscience to get involved, for being a virtuous person means to act in the knowledge that every believer who listens to his/her conscience and fears and respects Allah has a responsibility:

Would that there had been more people with a vestige of good among the generations of those who came before you, who forbade corruption in the land, other than the few among them whom We saved. Those who did wrong gladly pursued the life of luxury that they were given and were evildoers. (Surah Hud: 116)

This book will examine the nature of self-sacrifice from all of these angles. We will see that self-sacrifice is a moral virtue that must dominate a believer's life and that it must be lived in its totality to win Allah's favor. Basing their life on this strong understanding, believers strive toward what is good and thus serve as examples of this goodness both in this life and the Hereafter.

Some people avoid self-sacrifice, preferring this world's transient benefits to winning Allah's favor. But sooner or later, they will suffer great loss in both worlds. Thus, this book will stress the importance of this fact and call upon all believers to follow their conscience and lead lives of self-sacrifice. As the Qur'an says:

Say: "My prayer and my rites, my living and my dying, are for Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds." (Surat al-An'am: 162)

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-SACRIFICE

Only Allah knows the depth of a person's belief, love, and attachment to Him: **"He knows what they keep secret and what they make public. He knows what their hearts contain"** (Surah Hud: 5). However, each one of us can form an opinion about another person's belief, fear, and respect for Allah by observing external signs. The Qur'an mentions some important indications of a person's sincerity: observing the prescribed prayers, avoiding forbidden behavior, and doing one's best to live the kind of life of which He approves.

Allah tells us about those people who only pretend to believe. For example, they may act like believers, perform certain acts of worship, abstain from certain things that Allah has forbidden, and live as a believer lives. In addition, certain characteristics can reveal whether or not they are sincere, for some characteristics that are common among believers cannot be imitated. One of these is an unconditional determination to be self-sacrificial. This characteristic cannot be imitated by unbelievers, for they lack the desire to win Allah's favor and love, and attain Paradise, and therefore cannot sacrifice what they value to attain those goals. Sometimes, they may pretend to do so in order to hide their ignorance of the Qur'an's morality or gain some personal benefit. But when they are sure that no benefit is forthcoming, they lose their enthusiasm. When they think that they are about to lose something or suffer some emotional or physical setback, they cannot find the inner strength that comes from belief and so reveal their insincerity.

But believers regard any attempt to sacrifice for Allah's sake as a valuable opportunity to show their sincerity. They know that Allah creates difficult and troubling situations, which require patience and self-denial, for a good purpose. They act in the knowledge that this world is a short and transient place of testing to win Allah's favor, and so they seek to win His approval and attain Paradise:

The life of this world is nothing but a game and a diversion. The abode of the Hereafter - that is truly life, if they only knew. (Surat al-'Ankabut: 64)

Allah expands provision to anyone He wills and restricts it. They rejoice in the life of this world. Yet the life of this world, compared to the Hereafter, is only fleeting enjoyment. (Surat ar-Ra'd: 26)

Whatever you have been given is only the enjoyment of the life of this world. What is with Allah is better and longer lasting for those who believe and trust in their Lord. (Surat ash-Shura: 36)

In this world, Allah tests individuals so that they can overcome the lower self's desires by seeking to win Allah's favor and mercy. Thus, Allah tests people with blessings and with difficulties: **"Every self will taste death. We test you with both good and evil as a trial. And you will be returned to Us"** (Surat al-Anbiya': 35). He also reveals the purpose of our creation:

He created the heavens and Earth in six days, when His Throne was on the water, in order to test which of you has the best actions. (Surah Hud: 7)

He created death and life to test which of you is the best in action. He is the Almighty, the Ever-Forgiving. (Surat al-Mulk: 2)

Given this, the sensible course to follow is that of true sincerity and readiness to sacrifice, for the greatest virtue is to come in first in the race to do good deeds:

Then We made Our chosen servants inherit the Book. *But some of them wrong themselves, some are ambivalent, and some outdo each other in good by Allah's permission. That is the great favor.* (Surah Fatir: 32)

Had Allah willed, He would have made you a single community. But He wanted to test you regarding what has come to you. *So compete with each other in doing good.* Every one of you will return to Allah, and He will inform you regarding the things about which you differed. (Surat al-Ma'ida: 48)

Those who seek to do good in order to win Allah's favor act with great eagerness, determination, and self-sacrifice. Their sincere belief gives them many fine moral qualities: trusting in their submission to Allah as well as remain courageous, patient, merciful, helpful, tolerant, subtle in mind, and thankful in all circumstances. They are not caught up in any passion for this world and the desires of their lower self, for their goal is to win Allah's approval and mercy and to attain Paradise. In other words, they are so attached to Allah by a deep bond of love, respect, and fear that they will give up everything without a second thought for the sake of that love.

In the following example, the great Islamic scholar Imam al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) shows us that human life has no value that can compare with winning Allah's favor and mercy and attaining Paradise, and that those who choose to win His approval will be deemed worthy of reward:

Let's assume that someone has a very valuable and exquisite jewel. If he sells it for a low price when he could have sold it for a high price, would not this behavior be a loss to that individual and a grievous error? At the same time, would not this behavior indicate a deficiency of labor, a weakness of vision, and a shortage of reason?

Thus, in comparison with millions and even the whole world and its contents, the praise and things of this world that a servant will receive from other people, if not contented with the mercy, reward, praise, and merit that he will receive from the Lord of the worlds, are as next to nothing. Therefore, is it not a clear error to lose these valuable offerings from Allah the Almighty in return for these worthless things of this world?

If these worthless worldly things are absolutely necessary to you, turn again toward the Hereafter and you will see that the world will follow after you. Seek only the approval of the Lord, the almighty Presence, Lord of the two worlds.

The Prophet (saas) states: "There is no doubt that Allah gives the things of this world in return for labor belonging to the Hereafter, but not the Hereafter in return for labor belonging to this world." (al-Suyuti)

Thus those people who genuinely labor solely for His approval and for the Hereafter will have gained both this world and the Hereafter. In the same way that they lose the Hereafter if they turn toward this world, they may also not acquire the things of this world, either. Even if they do, those things will not remain in their hands forever. They will eventually become disappointed both in this world and in the Hereafter. (Imam al-Ghazzali, Minhaj al-'Abideen, pp. 264-65)

Believers Seek to Please Allah

People who do not live according to the Qur'an's moral teachings see their lower self as a part of themselves that must be cared for and protected. They do all they can to foster it, justify it, and bring its desires to fruition. They arrange their life, ideals, friendships, and viewpoints according to its demands, because they see it as a force that they must obey and whose every desire they must fulfill if they are ever going to be happy.

But these ideas are based on wrong beliefs, for Allah reveals that the lower self will always lead a person into evil, unless He wills otherwise: **"I do not say my [lower] self was free from blame. The [lower] self indeed commands to evil acts"** (Surah Yusuf: 53). For this reason, only by renouncing it can people be happy and content. Instead of accepting its demands and bowing down to it, people must assert control over it and direct it as Allah wills.

Since the lower self is created together with much evil, people must listen to their conscience and do good. Otherwise, it will lead them to live in ways that do not please Him and that will cause them great disappointment in this world and the Hereafter. Out of His mercy, Allah inspires the human conscience with many ways to train the lower self:

And [I swear by] the self and what proportioned it and inspired it with depravity or a sense of duty, the one who purifies it has succeeded, [and] the one who covers it up has failed. (Surat ash-Shams: 7-10)

Believers are aware of this truth because adopting the Qur'an as their guide means that they always listen to their conscience. But those whose belief is shallow sometimes fall victim to the lower self's desires even if they acknowledge this reality. As a result, many things in this life are more important for them than winning Allah's favor. Their basic goals are to get a good job, have a good marriage and a good circle of friends, be respected, have money, live in luxury, and make the best use of all of the blessings that this life has to offer. What is wrong with this? In short, they regard these things as more important than winning Allah's favor and so choose them instead of trying to please Him. Otherwise, it is legitimate to have all of the good things in this life.

People who think in this way generally do not believe in Allah, the Hereafter, or the Day of Judgment. They just take what they can from this life and placate their lower self. Some people want to hide their strong attachment to this life and their lower self by saying that they believe in Allah and that their main goal is to win His favor. Sometimes they might even display a moral attitude similar to that enjoined in the Qur'an. However, they show their real faces when something conflicts with their lower self's desires, and begins to harm their personal interests.

One can see this in daily life. For example, those who worry about the future think that guaranteeing their own material and emotional situation and that of their family is more important than winning Allah's favor. They may regard personal gain as more important than trying to conform to the Qur'an's moral teachings. The Qur'an describes the insincere nature of this spiritual state, for such people have no real belief and view their own profit as more important than Allah's approval:

Yet you see those with sickness in their hearts rushing to them, saying: "*We fear that the wheel of fate may turn against us.*" But it may well be that Allah will bring about victory or some other contingency. Then they will deeply regret their secret thoughts. (Surat al-Ma'ida: 52)

Such people do not consider that everything is under Allah's control and that everything happens, both now and in the future, only with His permission. No precautions can prevent a calamity from befalling them, and their efforts will be of no use if Allah has willed the calamity. In the same way, if Allah has willed that something good happens, no one can prevent it.

Those who are aware of this reality will not worry about this life or the future. As long as they are sincere and work to achieve Allah's favor, they will enjoy His assistance, mercy, and support, by His leave. In the Qur'an, He proclaims the glad

tidings of this mercy: **“Allah will certainly help those who help Him”** (Surat al-Hajj: 40). Only Allah gives us blessings. People who forget this, thinking that they can obtain their own blessings by pursuing the things of this world, are living in great error.

For sincere believers, nothing is more important than winning Allah’s favor in every sphere of life. For them, material possessions, wealth, status, respect, or concerns for the future are unimportant. They never compromise their goals, even if such a decision results in hardship or anxiety. They gladly undertake any act of self-sacrifice to win His favor, for they are aware that Allah’s friendship, love, and mercy are beyond value and cannot be compared with any earthly blessing, and that nothing can be given in exchange for them. As the Qur’an states:

Say: “My prayer and my rites, my living and my dying, are for Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds.” (Surat al-An'am: 162)

Allah has bought from the believers their selves and their wealth in return for the Garden. They fight in the way of Allah, and they kill and are killed. It is a promise binding on Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur’an. And who is truer to his contract than Allah? Rejoice, then, in the bargain that you have made. That is the great victory. (Surat at-Tawba: 111)

In another verse, He tells us that sincere believers regard winning His favor as more important than fulfilling their lower self’s desires:

And among the people are some who give up everything, desiring the good pleasure of Allah. Allah is Ever-Gentle with His servants. (Surat al-Baqara: 207)

As the Qur’an says, believers give up everything without a second thought in order to win Allah’s favor. Knowing that He will reward them with much finer things in the Hereafter, they live in this world without pursuing their own comfort and advantage, without expecting any return for their self-sacrifice. Their only hope is to win Allah’s approval:

“We feed you only out of desire for the Face of Allah. We do not want any repayment from you or any thanks.” (Surat al-Insan: 9)

Situations That May Require Self-Sacrifice

Allah created this life to test human beings with good and evil. For this reason, people may encounter sudden unexpected and disorientating events in which only belief can enable them to maintain a good moral character and adhere to the Qur’an’s moral

teachings. Their fear and respect of Allah, as well as their deep belief, allow them to react in the most appropriate way when confronted with unexpected and entirely new events. Basically, people can demonstrate self-sacrificial behavior under certain circumstances even without such belief. For example, if they think that they can gain respect in the eyes of others or that some advantage will accrue from it, they will engage in self-sacrificial behavior. But they cannot display such a moral character if some adversity happens to them suddenly and without warning.

In such unexpected situations, believers are happy and more than willing to sacrifice themselves without a second thought. In the days of our Prophet (saas), he and his Companions were shining examples of the self-sacrificial moral character that comes from sincere belief. Without regard for their lives or their possessions, they were determined to die in order to win Allah's approval when some people, mostly deniers, showed great enmity toward believers. When required, they were prepared to leave behind their homes, families, work, possessions, respect, and all the other worldly blessings to ensure the believers' comfort, contentment, security, and overall well-being. Putting our Prophet's (saas) security above their own lives, they became examples to all people, regardless of time or location, of superior moral character. The Qur'an tells us of the believers' faithfulness toward our Prophet (saas) and their self-sacrificial moral character:

The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves. (Surat al-Ahzab: 6)

Islamic scholars have passed down many such examples of the early Muslims' determination, courage, patience, and self-sacrificial actions done solely to win Allah's approval and mercy and attain Paradise. Living in a non-Islamic society, the Companions risked everything and believed in Muhammad (saas) as His Prophet, despite the unbelievers' oppression and threats. At that time, the powerful and respected members of the Makkan community applied great pressure to make the believers recant and return to their ancestral idolatry. Many sincere believers were determined to resist in order to win Allah's approval. Some of them were maimed by torture, had their hands and feet cut off, or even died. But none of them recanted. On the contrary, this oppression caused them to become more resolute, more self-sacrificial, and more eager to spread the Qur'an's morality. They may have been wounded in battles, but even this did not daunt them; rather, they accepted it as a blessing and a great honor. The Qur'an describes their excellent moral character:

Many a prophet has been fought when there were many thousands with him. They did not give up in the face of what assailed them in the way of Allah, nor did they weaken or yield. Allah loves the steadfast. All they said was: "Our

Lord, forgive us our wrong actions and any excesses that we went to in what we did. Make our feet firm and help us against these unbelieving people.” So Allah gave them the reward of this world and the best reward of the Hereafter. Allah loves good-doers. (Surah Al 'Imran: 146-48)

Another verse tells us that the Companions knew that all of these things drew them close to Allah and were important opportunities to attain Paradise: **“Nor will they give away any amount, whether large or small, nor will they cross any valley without it being written down for them so that Allah can recompense them for the best of what they did”** (Surat at-Tawba:121). Since it was an act of worship performed to win Allah’s approval, believers knew the joy of returning wounded from a battle and the excitement of joining another. At a time when the hypocrites, those who have diseased hearts, hold back in fear of being wounded, sincere believers are prepared to sacrifice everything for His cause:

Say: “What do you expect to befall us, except for one of the two best things? But what we expect to happen to you is for Allah to punish you either directly from Himself or through our hands. So wait. We are waiting with you.” (Surat at-Tawba: 52)

They realize that every difficulty they encounter is a mercy from Allah, and so do not pursue this world but try to win His approval and success in the Hereafter. The Qur’an describes the tears of those who are eager to sacrifice themselves but cannot find a horse to ride into battle with our Prophet (saas) or help other Muslims:

... nor is anything held against those who, when they asked you to provide them with mounts and you said: “I cannot find anything on which to mount you,” turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears, overcome by grief at having nothing to give. (Surat at-Tawba: 92)

All believers have experienced such things, for Allah says that He will test each person with regard to his/her possessions, life, friends and relatives, business, status, and respect. Satan stirs up in each person’s heart a strong love of this world, a passionate ambition for possessions and position, worries about the future, and an addiction to a comfortable life; he urges them to follow their lower self’s desires, robs them of their willpower, and urges them to be lazy and uninterested; and he leads them into fear and despair. But sincere believers always counter these incitements with the Qur’an’s morality so that they can win His approval by refusing to placate their lower self.

The Qur'an gives examples of situations in which believers could be called upon to make such personal sacrifices.

Abandoning Worldly Appetites

The Qur'an says that the world has been adorned in such a way to separate true believers from insincere people: **"We made everything on Earth adornment for it so that We could test them to see whose actions are the best"** (Surat al-Kahf: 7). Another verse describes some of these adornments:

The love of worldly appetites appears fair in people's eyes, painted in glowing colors: women and children, heaped-up mounds of gold and silver, horses with fine markings, livestock, and fertile farmland. All of that is merely the enjoyment of the life of this world. The best homecoming is in Allah's presence. (Surah Al 'Imran: 14)

Each thing listed here was created as a blessing for humanity. However, it is up to individual human beings to realize that these blessings are from Allah and that they are obliged to thank Him and use them in ways designed to win His favor. Each blessing should draw people closer to Allah and lead them to give Him greater thanks and better appreciate His greatness, intelligence, artistry, infinite mercy, and generosity. Individuals should always be aware that He can remove all of these things whenever He wills and that, apart from Him, there is no power that can help them.

Those believers who are aware of this understand that, apart from Allah, they have no other friends, or helpers, and that only Allah protects and cares for them, gives them their blessings and daily bread, makes their work easier, and bolsters their heart with a sense of contentment and security. They are attached to Allah with such a deep love and unshakable trust that their greatest fear is that of failing to win His approval, pleasure, love, and friendship. Therefore, they avoid any action that might cause this by doing their best to please Him and conform to the Qur'an's moral teachings.

In accord with this sincerity, they use every blessing they have to win Allah's favor, friendship, and infinite mercy. Of course, all of the things listed above are blessings for believers; however, they are never more important than winning His approval. Believers are never greedy for such profits, for they would give up any one of them immediately in order to win His approval.

Some people measure self-sacrifice in terms of looking after their own needs, desires, and comfort before considering the well-being of others. But this view has nothing to do with the moral understanding of self-sacrifice described in the Qur'an. When these people say that they have been self-sacrificial in some things, they mean only with regard to things they do not need, things whose absence does not really trouble them. They may think they are being self-sacrificial, but the Qur'anic morality is

being able to renounce all gain and give up without a second thought that which he/she loves the most:

You will not attain true goodness until you give of what you love. Whatever you give away, Allah knows it. (Surah Al 'Imran: 92)

Another measure is *not expecting any benefits in return other than Allah's good pleasure in performing self-sacrificial acts and not making the recipient feel obligated*. Some people do a favor for someone else and then take every opportunity to mention it so that the recipient will feel obligated and so that they can claim a favor in the future, if necessary. Some seek to collect appreciation from those around them, hoping that they will say how *generous and kind-hearted* they are. However, the purpose of sincere self-sacrifice is not to gain any material or emotional return, but to win Allah's approval: **"The metaphor of those who spend their wealth, desiring the pleasure of Allah and firmness for themselves, is that of a garden on a hillside. When heavy rain falls on it, it doubles its produce; and if heavy rain does not fall, there is dew. Allah sees what you do"** (Surat al-Baqara: 265). In addition: **"Those who give their wealth to purify themselves - not to repay someone else for a favor done - desiring only the Face of their Lord Most High. They will certainly be satisfied"** (Surat al-Layl: 18-21). The Qur'an tells us not to belittle others and make them feel obligated, and mentions a reward for those who follow these words:

Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and then do not follow what they have spent by demands for gratitude or insulting words will have their reward with their Lord. They will feel no fear and will know no sorrow. (Surat al-Baqara: 262)

The Qur'an also tells us that believers, because of their moral superiority, often keep quiet about what they have given:

[People of intelligence] are steadfast in seeking the Face of their Lord; perform prayer and give from the provision We have given them, secretly and openly; and stave off evil with good. They will have the Ultimate Abode. (Surat ar-Ra'd: 22)

Another measure of sincere self-sacrifice can be seen among those who are poor or who have limited means. Such people could claim material and emotional difficulties in an attempt to assuage their conscience. However, they must not forget that Allah cares for them, as well as supports and helps them, and that He will show them an easy way

out of their difficulties if they show a good moral character. Allah says that better things await those who seek only His approval:

Those who respond to their Lord will receive the best. But as for those who do not respond to Him, even if they owned everything on Earth and the same again with it, they would offer it as a ransom. They will receive an evil reckoning, and their shelter will be Hell. What an evil resting-place! (Surat ar-Ra'd: 18)

Those who refuse to be self-sacrificial and do favors for others, worrying that such actions might harm their interests, might wish to give everything that they have as a ransom to save themselves from the pains of Hell. However, they will learn on the Day of Judgment that nothing they offer will be accepted.

The Qur'an praises the superior morality of believers in this regard:

[The people who guard against evil] give in times of both ease and hardship, those who control their rage and pardon other people - Allah loves the good-doers. (Surah Al 'Imran: 134)

Your wealth and children are a trial. But with Allah there is an immense reward. (Surat at-Taghabun: 15)

The above verse reveals that the allures of this worldly life are only a trial and a source of temptation. In another verse, He warns those who are overcome by desire and forget about winning His favor:

O you who believe. Do not let your wealth or children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. Whoever does that is lost. (Surat al-Munafiqun: 9)

There may be times when people have to sacrifice not only their material possessions, but also their life. It should not be thought that this is restricted to certain situations. People enjoy many different blessings in this earthly life. Believers know that all of these blessings come from Allah's mercy in the form of a test, and so always think about how they can best use the means at their disposal to win Allah's favor. Sometimes they may have to risk their life to save another believer or give up their respect, rank, and position to help another person. Likewise, they may have to use their own money to solve another person's problems, sacrifice their orderly life for a person's well-being, put their own needs second to somebody else's health, or become physically exhausted and have to expend more effort than usual.

Fully aware believers try every day to use their mind and talents, knowledge and experience, physical strength and time in the best way. When required, they give up their own comfort and free time. For example, they may deprive themselves of sleep and food, ignore their personal affairs, and do good works with the intention of benefiting others. It would be quite reasonable for them to set apart large blocks of time for themselves and use the rest to help others. Although such people may be considered to act according to their conscience and freely donate their spare time, each action can still be done better. The spirit of self-sacrifice that comes from sincere belief leads people to do more than they were going to and to make the best use of every second at their disposal.

Allah offers human beings many such possibilities. However, some people get caught up in a great desire for the things of this world. Instead of thanking Allah for the blessings they have, they become less generous, and even greedy to acquire more:

Leave the person I created on his own to Me alone, the one to whom I have given great wealth and children who stay with him and whose way I have smoothed. Then this person wants Me to add yet more! (Surat al-Muddaththir: 11-15)

Greedy for the allures of this life, such people avoid self-sacrifice and, instead of trying to win Allah's favor, pursue their own gain:

Know that the life of this world is merely a game and a diversion, ostentation and a cause of boasting among yourselves, and trying to outdo one another in wealth and children - like the plant-growth after the rain, which delights the cultivators. But then it withers and you see it turning yellow, and then it becomes broken stubble. In the Hereafter, there is terrible punishment but also forgiveness from Allah and His good pleasure. The life of this world is nothing but the enjoyment of delusion. (Surat al-Hadid: 20)

As stated in this verse, whatever people possess and may avoid sacrificing is like plant-growth in the field, for one day everything will pass away. Only good deeds done to earn Allah's favor will receive the finest reward in His presence and turn into blessings in this life and the Hereafter. Allah reveals this truth:

Wealth and children are the embellishment of the life of this world. But in your Lord's sight, right actions that are lasting bring a better reward and are a better basis for hope. (Surat al-Kahf: 46)

Being Patient and Performing Self-Sacrificial Deeds

The Qur'an tells us that people will encounter hardships and anxiety as well as blessings: **"We will test you with a certain amount of fear and hunger, as well as loss of wealth and life and fruits. But give good news to the steadfast"** (Surat al-Baqara: 155). Allah explains the reason for this: **"We will test you until We know the true fighters among you and those who are steadfast, and test what is reported of you"** (Surah Muhammad: 31) and: **"Do people imagine that they will be left to say: 'We believe' and will not be tested? We tested those before them so that Allah would know the truthful and would know the liars"** (Surat al-'Ankabut: 2-3).

Indeed, hardship brings out a person's true character: courageous or cowardly; generous or mean; humane, aware, and compassionate, or thoughtless and selfish. In the same way, the excellent character of those believers who have dedicated their life to Allah and striven to win His favor is also revealed under harsh conditions. No matter what difficulty or hardship they may encounter, they will remain steadfast in the eagerness and determination that their belief has imparted to them. Even in the hardest circumstances they will try to do their best and help others. They know that Allah creates such circumstances to test people, to see whether they will engage in the same amount of self-sacrifice as they would if they were in a comfortable situation. For example, they cannot just be generous when they are well-off, but must be the same when they find themselves in reduced circumstances. They know that being distracted with their own problems and not considering other people's difficult straits are incompatible with the Qur'an's morality, for Allah is pleased when they help those in need.

The Qur'an tells us that the believers of Makkah, who abandoned all of their possessions and moved to Madinah to escape persecution, were welcomed by the believers of Madina. The latter took care of the former and gladly shared everything with them, even if they suffered as a result. The Qur'an tells us about the Madinan believers' (the *Ansar* [Supporters]) superior moral character toward the Makkan believers (the *Muhajirun* [Migrants]):

Those who were already settled in the abode, and in belief before they came, love those who have migrated to them, do not find in their hearts any need for what they have been given, and prefer them to themselves even if they themselves are needy. Those who are safe-guarded from the avarice of their own selves are successful. (Surat al-Hashr: 9)

Another verse reveals the good news about the Ansar, who put Allah's approval before appeasing the desires of their own hearts:

The forerunners - the first of the Migrants [Muhajirun] and the Supporters [Ansar] - and those who have followed them in doing good, Allah is pleased

with them and they are pleased with Him. He has prepared Gardens for them with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, forever and ever. That is the great victory. (Surat at-Tawba: 100)

Ali (ra) said that performing acts of self-sacrifice was a great blessing:

I do not know which of these two things is the greater in terms of gratitude: the first is my Muslim brother's applying to me with a pure intent with the idea of relieving my need. The second is Allah's making good his need through my hands. I swear that meeting the need of my Muslim brother is more delightful than having all the world's gold and silver by my side. (Muhammad Yusuf Kandahlawi, Hayat as-Sahabe [Life of the Companions], vol. 2: Sentez Nesriyat, p. 474.)

The Qur'an informs us of the excellent moral character of those believers who, in spite of their own need, gave to the poor, the orphans, and the captives:

They give food, despite their love for it, to the poor, the orphans, and the captives. [Believers say:] "We feed you only out of desire for the Face of Allah. We do not want any repayment or any thanks. Truly, We fear from our Lord a glowering, calamitous Day." So Allah has safeguarded them from the evil of that Day, has made them meet with radiance and pure joy, and will reward them for their steadfastness with a Garden and silk. (Surat al-Insan: 8-12)

In these verses, the Qur'an shows us the extent to which believers can sacrifice their own interests. They spend their lives fearing and respecting Allah and listening to their conscience. These things determine their actions. They know that everything they have given up to win His favor will earn them a far better reward in the Hereafter. Their need may be short-lived, but their good deeds will bring them Allah's love, friendship, and mercy. This hope will make them forget their deprivation, for it will be the source of great joy and pleasure. This is the only basis of real goodness and self-sacrifice. The Qur'an defines real goodness as:

It is not devoutness to turn your faces to the East or to the West. Rather, the truly devout believe in Allah and the Last Day, the Angels, the Book and the Prophets; those who, despite their love for it, give away their wealth to their relatives, the orphans and the very poor, the travelers and the beggars, to emancipate slaves, and perform prayer and give alms; those who honor their contracts when they make them and are steadfast in poverty, illness, and battle. Those are the people who are true. They are the people who guard against evil. (Surat al-Baqara: 177)

Here, it must be noted that people can never be sure of what they will encounter in the Hereafter. For this reason, believers have a constant hope, as well as a sense of fear, in regard to the Hereafter. Only knowing that they have spent their life seeking His approval and practicing the Qur'an's moral teachings keeps their hope constant and strong.

Spreading Good Morals

When believers consciously seek to live an honest and sincere morality, they encourage others around them to do the same. As Allah says, urging others to live a moral life is one of their responsibilities:

Let there be a community among you who call to the good, enjoin the right, and forbid the wrong. They are the ones who have success. (Surah Al 'Imran: 104)

Moreover, believers want others to experience the blessings and contentment that living such a moral life brings. The Qur'an says that leading a good life is possible only if people turn to Allah and live the kind of moral life that pleases Him: **"Only in the remembrance of Allah can the heart find peace"** (Surat ar-Ra'd: 28) and **"if anyone turns away from My reminder, his life will be a dark and narrow one, and on the Day of Resurrection, We will gather him blind"** (Surah Ta Ha: 124). Throughout history, a society's lack of religious morality has inevitably resulted in its people living lives full of anxiety in chaotic, war-torn environments; suffering hunger, famine, exile, and oppression; and denying orphans and those old people who are in need proper care.

Believers are aware of this fact and therefore eager to spread religious morality among their people. This undertaking requires self-sacrifice, patience, and determination. Moreover, believers understand the true Qur'anic nature of self-sacrifice and thus naturally feel a sense of responsibility when they see other people coping with anxiety and problems.

Having this clear awareness, believers do not remain uninvolved out of the mistaken idea that it is not their responsibility, that someone more skilled and intelligent should solve the problem, or that someone with more material resources should do something about it. They would never be so selfish as to think that they have enough problems of their own and that other people should solve their own problems. They consider the guidance, intelligence, understanding, and openness that they have received from Allah as great blessings and act accordingly. Without waiting for someone to ask for help, they are prepared to shoulder every responsibility and transcend their own milieu in an attempt to solve all people's problems. They do this so that they might

be examples of good moral character: **"... make us a good example for those who guard against evil"** (Surat al-Furqan: 74).

Sincere believers may be required to perform many acts of self-sacrifice to fulfill this responsibility. Such individuals place their own problems and needs second to solving the problems of others. They will mobilize all of their resources to do this, even to the point of suffering themselves. They will be patient, determined, and undaunted by the magnitude of the problems they encounter.

The Qur'an tells us about the prophets' and sincere believers' great efforts to establish religious morality, and stresses the importance of having a good moral character. Although they faced many difficulties while trying to fulfill this task, they spread their moral message with zeal, self-sacrifice, and complete sincerity, because their only purpose was to be rewarded with Allah's approval. Many Qur'anic verses inform us of the prophets' many sincere acts, all of which are examples to humanity. For example, Prophet Nuh (as) preached the importance of having a good moral character only to win Allah's approval:

... their brother Nuh asked them: "Will you not guard against evil?" [Nuh said:] "I am a faithful Messenger to you. I do not ask you for any wage for it. My wage is the responsibility of no one but the Lord of all the worlds." (Surat ash-Shu'ara': 106-109)

[Nuh said:] "My people, I do not ask you for any wealth for it. My wage is the responsibility of Allah alone. I will not chase away those who believe. They are surely going to meet their Lord. However, I consider you to be an ignorant [of true belief] people." (Surah Hud: 29)

The Qur'an tells us that the number of people who follow the prophets' advice is generally very small: **"Those are the signs of the Book. And what has been sent down to you from your Lord is the Truth. But most people do not believe"** (Surat ar-Ra'd: 1). Most people do not accept this invitation to salvation in both worlds, even though doing so would give them a good and happy life. Moreover, they are determined not to understand the message.

The prophets and other sincere believers who preached the importance of having a good moral character were always patient and displayed their moral excellence and sincere self-sacrifice by speaking the *finest of words*. They did all that they could not for their own gain, but to save people from the pain of Hell. They did not become angry with those who refused their message, for their awareness enabled them to proclaim the truth patiently and to find the best way to reach others. Prophet Nuh's (as) message to his people clearly shows his sincerity, self-sacrifice, and patience:

He [Nuh] said: “My Lord, I have called my people night and day. But my calling has only made them more evasive. Indeed, every time I told them of Your forgiveness, they put their fingers in their ears, wrapped themselves up in their clothes, and were overweeningly arrogant. Then I called them openly. Then I addressed them both publicly and privately.” (Surah Nuh: 5-9)

Prophet Nuh (as) used many methods to convince his people to follow the true path. These verses tell us that this virtuous person advised his people day and night and that they opposed him so much that *they put their fingers in their ears [and] wrapped themselves up in their clothes*. But in spite of this, he continued to relay Allah’s message with patience and sincerity:

[Nuh said:] “I said: ‘Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Truly, He is Endlessly Forgiving. He will send heaven down on you in abundant rain and reinforce you with more wealth and children, and grant you gardens and waterways. Why do you not hope for honor from Allah, when He created you by successive stages? Do you not see how He created seven heavens in layers, placed the Moon as a light in them, and made the Sun a blazing lamp? Allah caused you to grow from earth, and will return you to it and bring you out of it again. Allah has spread out the land as a carpet for you so that you can use its wide valleys as roadways.’” Nuh said: “My Lord, they have disobeyed me and followed those whose wealth and children have only increased them in loss. *They have hatched a mighty plot.*” (Surah Nuh: 10-22)

No one responded to Nuh’s (as) sincere appeal; rather, the Qur’an reveals that they *hatched a mighty plot*.

Other prophets and sincere believers encountered similar opposition from their people. But instead of being intimidated, they persisted in calling them to believe in Allah and live lives pleasing to Him. Allah tells His servants who engage in self-sacrifice only to win His favor that:

If anyone desires the reward of this world, We will give him some of it. If anyone desires the reward of the Hereafter, We will give him some of it. We will recompense the thankful. (Surah Al 'Imran: 145)

Being Patient and Self-Sacrificial at All Times

Prophets and believers have always encountered many hardships, for their people seldom welcome them. Their attempts to spread the Qur’an’s high morality conflicted with the interests of those societies inhabited by unbelievers, hypocrites, and idolaters. Such people thought that being honest and having good intentions, engaging in self-

sacrifice and generosity, doing good deeds without expecting any return, treating people justly and kindly, and regarding everyone as equal without distinguishing between rich and poor would undo their social system. They understood that the unjust and immoral practices so far in effect would attract far more attention once people who practiced such a morality became the majority. These worries caused them to harbor a great enmity toward all believers, which, in turn, blinded them to the good that following the Qur'an's morality would bring them or the wisdom of the advice contained therein. The prophets spread the message through every kind of self-sacrifice and without expecting any reward, but their people, unable to conquer their own hostility, did whatever they could to stop them and invalidate the message in their people's eyes.

The unbelievers' reaction is always the same. The Qur'an tells us that this is a special test created for believers:

You will be tested in your wealth and in your selves, and you will hear many abusive words from those given the Book before you and from the idolaters. But if you are steadfast and guard against evil, that is the most resolute course to take. (Surah Al 'Imran: 186)

Believers know that all accusations and destructive calumny leveled against them are only part of the test sent by Allah. Therefore, they are not swayed by hardship; rather, they eagerly continue to spread the importance of good morality, hoping to be rewarded in the Hereafter. They experience full contentment and security in the knowledge that Allah always helps, advocates for, and supports sincere believers.

Unbelievers set traps for believers, thinking that they can put them off with accusations and attacks. But the Qur'an reveals that He will bless all believers with success and disprove all of the accusations made against them. For example, people slandered Prophet Musa (as), but Allah exonerated him:

O you who believe. Do not be like those who abused Musa. Allah absolved him of what they said, and he was highly honored with Allah. (Surat al-Ahzab: 69)

Historically, all accusations made against prophets and believers have been pretty much the same. Whenever they called upon their unbelieving societies to practice true religion and high morality, the people accused them of sorcery and of being crazy poets:

Do people find it so surprising that We should reveal to a man among them: "Warn humanity and give good news to those who believe that they are on a sure footing with their Lord?" The unbelievers say: "This is downright magic." (Surah Yunus: 2)

They say: “You, to whom the Reminder has been sent down, *are clearly crazy.*” (Surat al-Hijr: 6)

Furthermore they say: “A muddled jumble of dreams!” “He has invented it!” “He is a poet!” and “Let him bring us a sign like those sent to previous peoples.” (Surat al-Anbiya’: 5)

[They said:] “Out of all of us, has the Reminder been given to him? No indeed! *He is an impudent liar.*” (Surat al-Qamar: 25)

The ruling circle of his people who did not believe said: “He is nothing but a human being, like yourselves, who *simply wants to gain ascendancy over you.* If Allah had wanted, He would have sent down angels. We never heard of anything like this among our ancestors, the earlier peoples.” (Surat al-Mu’minun: 24)

Those who do not believe say: “*This is nothing but a lie that he has invented,* and other people have helped him do it. They have brought injustice and falsehood.” (Surat al-Furqan: 4)

Unbelievers use such slander to diminish the influence of the believers’ words. But what makes the believers’ words so effective is their sincerity, honesty, awareness, and truthfulness, not to mention the fact that they are calling people to solid truth. Only Allah can cause these words to influence people and move their hearts. So, such events do not affect the people in the way that the unbelievers had hoped.

In addition, other believers pay no attention to the slander directed toward fellow believers, for the Qur’an states: **“O you who believe. If an unbeliever brings you a report, scrutinize it carefully in case you attack people in ignorance and later on come to regret greatly what you have done”** (Surat al-Hujurat: 6). Knowing that all prophets and sincere believers have encountered such accusations, believers think good things about their fellow believers and support each other to prove that the accusations have no foundation. As befits their character, they pay no heed to these accusations and slurs, for they **“strive in the way of Allah and do not fear the blame of any censurer”** (Surat al-Ma’ida: 54).

The unbelievers’ war of words is not limited to making false accusations; sometimes, they actually threaten and oppress the believers in an effort to stop the spread of religious morality among their people. They threaten the believers with death, exile, prison, and torture; sometimes, they actually assault them. The Qur’an tells us that this is nothing new, for:

When those who do not believe were planning to imprison you or kill you or expel you, they were planning and Allah was planning. However, Allah is the Best Planner. (Surat al-Anfal: 30)

Clearly, the unbelievers seek to get the believers arrested, killed, or exiled. But instead of doing so openly, they set traps to stop the spread of the Qur'an's morality. The Qur'an tells us of these traps in many verses. One example is the case of Prophet Lut (as) and his family, whom the unbelieving inhabitants of the land wanted to expel for trying to live a pure and upright life among them. Prophet Lut (as) called upon the people to live a moral life and to abandon their shameless immorality, but:

The only response of his people was to say: "Drive the family of Lut out of your city! They are people who keep themselves pure!" (Surat an-Naml: 56)

Right after he and his family left, Allah destroyed the city and turned the traps set for believers against those who had set them.

Believers were also threatened with imprisonment. In fact, the Qur'an reveals that Pharaoh threatened Prophet Musa (as) with prison if he did not obey him:

He [Pharaoh] said [to Musa]: "If you take any deity other than me, I will certainly throw you into prison." (Surat ash-Shu'ara': 29)

Another method was execution, based upon their mistaken belief that killing the prophets would prevent the spread of the Qur'an's morality and intimidate other believers. The people's threat to stone Prophet Shu'ayb (as) to death was a result of this hostile attitude:

They said: "O Shu'ayb, we do not understand much of what you say and we see you are weak among us. Were it not for your clan, we would have stoned you. We do not hold you in high esteem!" (Surah Hud: 91)

Pharaoh and his inner circle made plans to kill Prophet Musa (as). But with Allah's help, Musa (as) learned of this trap:

A man came running from the furthest part of the city, shouting: "Musa, the council is conspiring to kill you, so leave! I bring you good advice." (Surat al-Qasas: 20)

Prophet Ibrahim's (as) people tried in vain to burn the prophet who called upon them to abandon their idols and worship Allah. But Allah miraculously rescued His messenger from this difficult situation:

The only answer of his people was to say: "Kill him or burn him!" But Allah rescued him [Ibrahim] from the fire. There are certainly signs in that for people who are believers. (Surat al-'Ankabut: 24)

Unbelievers act with as much hostility toward sincere believers as they do toward prophets. But no matter how aggressive their assaults may be, all prophets and believers continue to call their people to accept the Qur'an's morality with great patience. Despite all of their hardships, they remain examples of courage and self-sacrifice. They submit themselves to Allah in trust and resignation, knowing that He controls everything:

Say: "Call on your partner deities, try all of your wiles against me, and grant me no reprieve. My Protector is Allah, Who sent down the Book. He takes care of the righteous." (Surat al-A'raf: 195-196)

[Believers are] those to whom people said: "The people have gathered against you, so fear them." But that merely increased their faith, and they said: "Allah is enough for us and the Best of Guardians." (Surah Al 'Imran: 173)

[Their messengers said:] "And why should we not put our trust in Allah, when He has guided us to our ways? We will be steadfast however much you harm us. Those who trust put their trust in Allah." (Surah Ibrahim: 12)

Say: "Nothing can happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us. He is Our Master. It is in Allah that the believers should put their trust." (Surat at-Tawba: 51)

These traps and assaults, which always end favorably for believers, reveal those people who have a sickness in their heart, who work against believers, and who refuse to sacrifice for His sake. The Qur'an describes the attitudes of those who lose their zeal to spread the message in times of difficulty and who even rejoice in their lack of eagerness:

Among you there are people who hang back and if you encounter a setback then they say, "Allah has blessed me in that I was not there with them." (Surat an-Nisa': 72)

However, being slow and lazy in proclaiming the Qur'an's morality, avoiding self-sacrifice and putting the responsibility on others is not the proper way to behave. Those who ignore their conscience and abandon the truth, even though they understand it in their mind and conscience, must not think that they have gained anything. Those who are slow and among the last to live the kind of moral life pleasing to Allah will find themselves held accountable for such serious errors. Those who remain passive in this world in order to preserve their own comfort and protect their own interests will, in the Hereafter, suffer misery beyond their most vivid imaginations. Their ensuing pangs of conscience will cause them great anxiety. Besides this, if Allah wills, He may give such people misery in this life, too:

Leave them then until they meet their Day, when they will be struck down by the Blast, the Day when their ploys will not profit them at all and they will not be helped. And those who do wrong will have a punishment besides that. But most of them do not know it. (Surat at-Tur: 45-47)

Believers place their trust in Allah when confronted with the pressure exerted on them by those seeking to block the spread of the Qur'an's morality. They will do their best to live according to the Qur'an's moral teachings regardless of their circumstances. Allah gives these people the following glad tidings:

If Allah helps you, no one can defeat you. If He forsakes you, who can help you after that? So the believers should put their trust in Allah. (Surah Al 'Imran: 160)

O Prophet! Allah is enough for you and for the believers who follow you. (Surat al-Anfal: 64)

But if they turn away, say: "Allah is enough for me. There is no deity but Him. I have put my trust in Him. He is the Lord of the Mighty Throne." (Surat at-Tawba: 129)

Even in the face of hardship, sincere believers continue to spread the message with great enthusiasm, because they want to outdo each other in goodness and be in the forefront of those who win Allah's pleasure. They know that the self-sacrifice enjoined in the Qur'an is not limited to certain situations only, and realize that they must live every moment undaunted by hardship and determined to practice this morality. This moral character is praised in the Qur'an, and Allah promises them the following reward:

Many a prophet has been fought when there were many thousands with him. They did not give up in the face of what assailed them in the way of Allah, nor did they weaken or yield. Allah loves the steadfast. All they said was: "Our Lord, forgive our wrong actions and any excesses that we went to in what we did. Make our feet firm and help us against these unbelieving people." So, Allah gave them the reward of this world and the best reward of the Hereafter. Allah loves good-doers. (Surah Al 'Imran: 146-148)

Not All Acts Might Have the Same Value in the Sight of Allah

Earlier in this book, we referred to the fact that experiencing hardship and difficulties is an important test for distinguishing sincere believers from hypocrites. The Qur'an reveals in many verses that even those who live among believers and display a similar moral character may act quite differently when confronted with hardship. Many people can put up with some hardship in an otherwise comfortable environment, but they may not show this moral quality when hardship occurs. In any case, only those people who have strong belief can really trust in Allah, remain committed to Him, and struggle to overcome their difficulties.

Some individuals ignore this fact, feeling that it is enough to do a few good deeds in the midst of their prosperity. However, in times of hardship, they avoid such self-sacrifice on the pretext of having done some good deeds already. They present these deeds as proof that they have the spirit of self-sacrifice described in the Qur'an. Such people also claim that they are not responsible for dealing with other people's problems when they have to deal with their own difficulties. They think that someone else should assume this responsibility.

But such thinking has nothing to do with the Qur'an's moral teaching, for Allah has made people responsible for living a good moral life. Therefore, everyone is responsible for making a life-long commitment to self-sacrifice and for remaining patient, trusting, sincere, honest, loyal, and faithful at all times: **"Wealth and children are the embellishment of the life of this world. But in your Lord's sight, right actions that are lasting bring a better reward and are a better basis for hope"** (Surat al-Kahf: 46). The self-sacrifice described in the Qur'an is something undertaken willingly by those who are patient even when their own interests are thwarted and they are put at risk.

The Qur'an tells us that the self-sacrifice of those believers who are experiencing difficulties is not the same as the efforts made by those who are in the midst of secure prosperity. People in need and those dealing with their own problems, and yet who still give generously of what they have, have far more value in His sight:

And how is it with you that you do not give in the way of Allah, when the inheritance of the heavens and Earth belongs to Allah? Those of you who gave and fought before the victory are not the same as those who gave and fought afterwards. They are higher in rank. But to each of them Allah has promised the best. Allah is aware of what you do. (Surat al-Hadid: 10)

In another verse, Allah reveals the real reason why people with weak belief are reluctant to engage in self-sacrifice in difficult times: **“If it had been a case of easy gains and a short journey, they would have followed you. But the distance was too great for them...”** (Surat at-Tawba: 42). These people live and work in harmony with sincere believers in times of comfort and prosperity, but are discouraged when hardships come.

But because they fear and respect Allah, sincere believers show courage and determination even in times of hardship. Their zeal to win Allah’s favor never falters. In fact, such apparently difficult situations actually become easy for believers who view them through the eyes of belief. They live trusting in the knowledge that Allah will help all sincere believers who are committed to practicing the Qur’an’s moral teachings and winning His favor regardless of any worldly benefit.

Believers who are aware of this reality must continue to practice self-sacrifice in times of hardship. However, Allah says that certain people are exempt from this responsibility: **“Nothing is held against the weak and the sick, nor against those who find nothing to spend, provided that they are true to Allah and His messenger. There is no way open against good-doers. Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful”** (Surat at-Tawba: 91). Those who fear and respect Allah in their conscience and know this truth do not shirk their duty to pursue their own interests. For the Qur’an gives us some examples from the time of our Prophet (saas), revealing that no excuse for doing so is valid:

There are only grounds [of complaint] against those who ask you for permission to stay when they are rich. They were pleased to be among those who were left behind. Allah has sealed up their hearts, so they do not know. (Surat at-Tawba: 93)

They will make excuses to you when you return to them. Say: “Do not make excuses, [for] we will not believe you. Allah has already informed us about you. Allah will see your actions, as will His messenger. Then you will be returned to the Knower of the Unseen and the Visible, and He will inform you of what you did.” (Surat at-Tawba: 94)

These people try to persuade those around them that their attitudes are quite reasonable. But in reality, they are only attempting to quiet their own conscience. Sometimes they use the excuse of having family or business responsibilities to give the impression that they are not in a position to sacrifice for others. However, they know that their excuses are invalid. In addition, they are aware that everything in this life is transitory and that only Allah is eternal; He is the One to Whom everything will finally return. Allah knows their real intention: **“We know those of you who have gone ahead and those who are still to come”** (Surat al-Hijr: 24). In spite of this, they still prefer to satisfy their lower self rather than to win Allah’s favor. They fall into the serious error of thinking that it is to their advantage to protect their own interests, whereas their real advantage is to seek His approval, for only He, the Lord of the worlds, can protect and bestow blessings upon them, and ensure their security, contentment, and ease.

Those who have a selfish moral character will find themselves belittled both in this world and in Hereafter. In fact, the Qur’an proclaims about those who avoid self-sacrifice:

If Allah returns you to a group of them and they ask you for permission to go out, say: “You will never go out with me, nor will you ever fight an enemy with me. You were happy to stay behind the first time, so stay behind with those who are left behind.” (Surat at-Tawba: 83)

In addition, those who claim to believe and yet choose their own interests over earning Allah’s approval will experience great sorrow in the Hereafter. But if they consider these truths and live as best as they can according to the Qur’an’s moral teachings, they can hope to be saved from this eternal sorrow.

THE CURRENT IMPORTANCE OF MUSLIMS' BEING SELF-SACRIFICIAL

From the beginning of this book, we have stressed the importance of self-sacrifice as a defining feature of the believers' sincerity as well as the many opportunities that arise to practice it. Therefore, when such opportunities arise they should use them to draw closer to Allah and help them win His approval. When we look at the world today, especially the Muslim world, we can clearly see the importance of practicing the Qur'an's morality.

We see almost every day on television and in the newspapers all of the chaos, oppression, tyranny, and injustice that results from rejecting this morality.

War and internal chaos continue to plague people all over the world. In Palestine, Chechnya, and East Turkestan (Sinkiang/Xinjiang), people struggle just to survive. Just in the twentieth century, we have seen hundreds of thousands of unarmed civilians killed, women raped, people tortured or maimed, loved ones killed or disappeared, and many millions more driven out of their homes and exiled from their homelands of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Kosovo, Algeria, Tunisia, Eritrea, Egypt, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Rwanda, East Turkestan, Chechnya, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Sudan. Innocent children have been shot, babies have been murdered in their cribs, and people trying to escape have been killed or maimed by land mines. Human beings have been subjected to a savagery the like of which has never been seen before, treated with great cruelty, and forced to live in inhuman conditions in prison camps.

Internal chaos continues, as does the cruel oppression of women and children. Human beings wait for someone with a conscience to offer a helping hand, for they cannot make their voices heard. We can see the magnitude of this problem just by looking briefly at several of the above-mentioned lands.

Where Muslims Are Oppressed Palestine

For over half a century and without any justification, the Muslims of Palestine have been driven out of their homes, shot, attacked, seen their houses demolished, had their lands and fields destroyed, and tortured and treated with violence. The world media have reported very few of the cases in which such inhumane treatment has been meted out to women, children, and young people.

Since the 1948 occupation of Palestine, where 70 percent of the population is composed of young people, children have been displaced, arrested, imprisoned, or murdered. Palestinians are treated like second-class citizens in their own land. In those

areas where this aggression is especially intense, every day several children are killed and more than 10 are wounded.

Without any provocation, a man bringing home bread may be shot before the eyes of his pregnant wife and children. Helicopters open fire on women working in the fields, but no explanation is ever given. Children returning home from school are shot and killed by Israeli soldiers. Many victims die because ambulances are not allowed to come and take them to the hospital. Millions of people have been living for years in hunger and misery in refugee camps, and many Muslims, including women, are subjected to all kinds of torture in prisons. Besides, there is the constant threat of a new bombardment. (For a detailed discussion see Harun Yahya, *Palestine* [Islamic Book Service: 2003].)

However, it also needs to be made clear that it is impossible to hold all Israelis responsible for the suffering of Palestinian Muslims; it would be totally wrong to do so. It is radical Zionism, a racist ideology, that lies at the heart of this savagery taking place in these lands. The violent policies of radical Zionists are also condemned by many Jews of faith, common sense and conscience.

As Muslims, our heartfelt wish is that all of these atrocities will come to an end and that peace will come to the Middle East. But we are also opposed to the bombing of innocent Israelis by a few radical Muslims in retaliation for Israel's shooting of innocent civilians. The land of Palestine is a sacred land in which Jews, Muslims and, of course, Christians should live together in peace. True peace can be brought to the Middle East when people live by the love, compassion, tolerance and affection commanded by religious moral values and when just solutions to all disagreements are found based on Allah's commandments.

Kashmir

Like many Muslim peoples in Asia, the Muslims of Kashmir also suffered from war and aggression in the second half of the twentieth century. Due to India's oppressive occupation, Kashmir has been deprived of peace, well-being, and stability for almost 50 years. Recognized for its strategic importance, mineral wealth, and especially for its Muslim population, Kashmir wants either to be a fully independent country or to join Pakistan. This runs contrary to the interests of India, Russia, and China. As a result, economic embargos have been imposed, violence and unwarranted arrests have occurred, and people have been tortured. Also, Pakistan has endured international pressure and embargos because it continues to support the Kashmiris.

After the partition of India into India, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and West Pakistan (now Pakistan), Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan. Ever since, the Indian portion of this predominantly Muslim state has been an occupied land. In 1947, 1965, and 1971 three massive attempts were made to eradicate the Kashmiri Muslims, who were determined to throw off the Indian yoke. Tens of thousands of them were killed, and more than 4,000 women were raped and tortured. Religious schools

were closed so that the children could not receive an Islamic education. After 1990, the Indian occupation became increasingly severe. Civilians were arrested and tortured to death, houses were burned, defenseless people were assaulted, and schools and newspapers were closed. Not content with these armed assaults, New Delhi even used dams employed for agricultural purposes to torture Muslims: The reservoirs behind the dams would be filled with water and, when the monsoons came, the gates would be opened so that Azad Kashmir (the Pakistani part) and Pakistan below would be inundated. This practice killed thousands of people, caused great destruction, and engendered a refugee problem.

But there is even more. Various propaganda conceals the reality of oppression and torture afflicted on innocent people so that the whole world remains silent in the face of these atrocities. The human rights reports seem to be ignored. Those Kashmiri Muslims who resist and struggle to live in peace in their own land are presented as radical terrorists. However, for close to half a century, the Kashmiri Muslims have only wanted to practice their religion in peace, live freely as Muslims in their own land, and bring up their children in peace and security. This continual denial to Kashmiri Muslims of their basic rights, together with the torture to which they are subjected, shows how important it is to sensitize people of conscience to this situation.

East Turkestan (Sinkiang/Xinjiang)

The Muslims of East Turkestan have lived under Chinese control for 250 years, and are still oppressed by Beijing. After Mao seized control of China, these Muslims refused to be assimilated. Thus, plans were drawn up to subjugate them. Either as the result of being murdered by the People's Liberation Army or by a regime-engineered famine, 2.8 million people were killed between 1949-52, 3.5 million people were killed between 1952-57, 6.7 million people died between 1958-60, and 13.3 million people were murdered between 1961-65. Those who survived were subjected to terrible torture and oppression. Their oppression was no different from what the Serbs inflicted upon the Bosnian Muslims or the Albanian majority in Kosovo. Chinese methods of "justice" were extremely cruel and savage: being buried alive, being beaten to the point of death and left lying in the snow, or having their legs attached to oxen and being pulled apart.

Since 1949, Beijing has sought to diminish the number of Muslims, and make them a minority in their own country by encouraging ethnic Chinese to move there. Today, Uighurs are forced to live in villages whereas Chinese have been moved to the cities. In addition, Beijing has used East Turkestani Muslims as subjects in nuclear experiments. The first experiments, which took place on October 16, 1964, caused many people in the region to come down with fatal illnesses. In addition, 20,000 deformed children were born, as many as 210,000 Muslims died, and thousands of people were either maimed or suffered from cancer.

From 1964 to the present day, nearly 50 atom bombs have been detonated in East Turkestan. Swedish experts determined that a nuclear bomb detonated experimentally in 1984 registered 6.8 on the Richter scale.

In its attempt to make the people of East Turkestan give up their religion, the chauvinistic Chinese government under Mao used many methods of pressure and intimidation. The most intense period was between 1966-76, during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Mosques were razed, public prayer was forbidden, Qur'anic schools were closed, Chinese migrants did everything they could to harass Muslims, anti-religious propaganda was disseminated in schools, and teaching religion was forbidden.

The violence against Muslim Turks in East Turkestan continues. Chinese officials regard young Turks as potential opponents and remove them from their homes without warrant. To escape this oppression, many young people run away into the mountains or the desert.

Since around 1996, tens of thousands of Uighurs have been held in camps, where they are known to be badly tortured. According to an official report by a human rights organization, detainees are sentenced to hard labor or public execution by firing squad after their first hearing, for the courts do what the Communist party tells them to do. Among the most horrible things is that pregnant women are taken from their houses and sterilized, and that babies born in excess of the permitted quota are killed. (See Harun Yahya, *Communist China's Policy of Oppression in East Turkestan* [Islamic Book Service: 2003].)

Chechnya

After the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, some ethnic groups declared their independence. About 1 million Chechens had suffered and been oppressed during the long years of Russian rule. They declared their independence in 1996 after the war of independence began under the leadership of Dzhokhar Dudayev.

Some Chechen villages were bombed as a result of a new war that started when Dagestan asked Shamil Basayev, the Chechen freedom fighter, for help. Only two people survived these bombings. Russian soldiers on Chechen soil mercilessly killed every innocent person they came across, whether old or young, and began to bomb civilian targets. Hospitals were particularly targeted for chemical bombardment, Scud missile attacks, and napalm, as were maternity clinics, markets, and refugee convoys.

The Russians also poisoned the Argun River. Many women and children died after drinking the poisoned water, and hundreds of people suffered permanent side-effects. In two years, Chechnya lost three-quarters of its population. Some fled to neighboring countries and tried to survive under very difficult conditions. Moscow intended to destroy the Chechen rebellion by November 2000, but failed to do so. The Chechen struggle for freedom continues even today.

Several human rights organizations who have studied the situation of Chechen refugees reveal that these refugees are suffering an immense violation of their human rights. Chechens endure hunger, thirst, communicable diseases, and travel many kilometers on foot. Men and women, the old and the young, are forced to flee in the snow and intense cold, and then struggle to survive with 2-3 families holed up in train cars or stables.

Chechens living in refugee camps cannot send their children to school because they cannot find winter clothes for them. Nearly half of those who have shelter have become ill from the bad conditions and intense cold. Some do not eat a hot meal for weeks. Such diseases as tuberculosis and hepatitis have spread quickly because many people cannot endure the harsh conditions in which they are forced to live. The death rate has risen. In spite of this, countries in the region continually cut back their aid and thus it has become difficult for the refugees to find a crust of bread as they struggle with intense cold, thirst, and hunger. (For a more detailed discussion see Harun Yahya, *The Winter of Islam and the Spring To Come* [Global Publishing: 2004].)

The Hardships Endured by Children

One of the believers' responsibilities is to alleviate the suffering of children. Many children live under bridges, rifle through garbage cans, and risk their lives for very little money. They have no homes and insufficient nourishment, and many of them die. The number of children who are subject to ill-treatment and violence, who are neglected, exploited, and sexually abused, continues to rise.

Statistical calculations by relevant agencies show just how serious this problem is.

Poverty and Poor Health Conditions

- There are 2.2 billion children in the world: 1 billion live under the poverty line. According to a UNICEF report, half of the world's children suffer from poverty, conflict, and AIDS.

- An estimated 1.1 billion children do not grow up in a healthy home environment. There are 90 million street children.

- Every year throughout the world, 40,000 children die.

- Handicapped children cannot take advantage of education or their right to health. 85% of all children grow up with problems.

- In 2003, 10.6 million children died. Most of these deaths could have been prevented. According to a 2005 UNICEF report, 29,158 die each day before their fifth birthday.

- The child mortality rate is largely due to malnutrition. In developing countries, 174 million children aged 0-5 are malnourished and underweight.

- Iron insufficiency in children under the age of 2 gradually makes it hard for them to communicate and causes mental retardation.

- Only 71% of children have access to clean drinking water.⁷ Despite the fact that 2 million children a year (most of them under 5 years of age) die from illnesses caused by contaminated drinking water, the world remains unable to ensure clean water and good health conditions.

- More than 20 million babies (one in five) are born underweight (under 2.5 kilos). This is the major reason why every year 4 million babies die before they are a month old. Being born underweight increases by 50% the risks of contracting diabetes, cancer, and heart disease in the future.

- In the developing countries, 30 million babies do not reach their first birthday. More than 900,000 children under the age of 5 die from measles. Every year, more than 200,000 new-born babies die of tetanus. Every year, 370,000 die of whooping cough and 50,000 more die of tuberculosis. All of these illnesses can be prevented by vaccination.

- Every year, 200,000 new-born babies die of preventable illnesses in their first month of life.

- 5 million babies die due to insufficient health care during pregnancy and labor.

- Every year, 2 million babies under the age of 5 die from a lack of professional care for respiratory track infections.

- Every year, 400,000 babies die from pneumonia and meningitis.

- Due to the discontinuation of campaigns to stop the HIV/AIDS epidemic, every year 250,000 children and young people contract this fatal virus.

- AIDS, which is particularly rampant in refugee camps, has killed 3.8 million children and created 15 million orphans.

Child Labor and Exploitation

- In developing countries, 253 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 work, and between 50 and 60 million between the ages of 5 and 11 work in dangerous conditions.

- In Thailand, children between the ages of 7 and 15 are forced to work in factories for 12-14 hours a day. Some of them go blind as a result.

- Every year about 2 million children are sexually exploited. These children endure forced labor from the age of 10 and eventually die at about 30.

Children and War

- In the last 10 years, 2 million children have died in war. Six million more have been seriously wounded or crippled. Millions of children have been forced to use violence. 16 million have suffered psychological trauma and 15 million have been left homeless. Approximately 25 million have been separated from their families. The number of child refugees stands at 5.43 million. (UN 2002)

- Unable to read the warnings posted in war-torn areas, the number of children killed or crippled by stepping on mines increases every day. In 90 countries, children

have to contend with 60 million land mines placed by warring armies and rebels. Every year 10,000 children are affected. (UN report 2002)

- Children continue to die due to the lack of food and health services after fighting.

- In some areas, children become soldiers in order to survive: 300,000 children between the ages of 7 and 14 are actively engaged in war and armed conflicts.

- More than 300,000 children throughout the world, most under the age of 10, have been abducted and forced into military service. Many girls in this situation have been subject to sexual assault. (UN report 2002)

The Problems of Refugees

War-induced poverty has forced many people from their lands. Although the whole world knows what these people suffered during the war, many countries do not accept refugees. These people walk for days and weeks in the cold in search of a secure place to live and are often forced to go from one country to another. Today, there are approximately 21 million refugees in the world. A few examples will be enough to explain their need for help.

Since March 1998, because of the war in Kosovo, many of the area's cities have been almost emptied. Due to harsh winter conditions, more than 300,000 Kosovans were driven from their homes and forced to walk for days, perished.

In November 1999, no country accepted those Chechens fleeing on foot from Russian attacks. Many women, children, and elderly people died before reaching the borders of Turkey, which did accept them.

Of the world's 9 million Palestinians, 4 million live in Palestine and 5 million live beyond its borders, mostly in refugee camps. More than half of those who live inside Palestine have been displaced and forced to live in refugee camps. In other words, nearly 75% of the Palestinian people have been forced out of their homes by armed violence and continue to live under extremely harsh conditions in these camps.

As Palestinians were expelled from their homes, 531 villages were totally evacuated and 90% of them were completely destroyed by the occupying state. The Palestinians forced from their homes could not live in peace in the places they migrated to. The refugees who settled in the as-yet unoccupied West Bank and Gaza were subjected to frequent aggression and slaughter, after the June 1967 war, by air and land attacks. The worst incident came about as the result of the attack against the refugee camp at Jenin, where approximately 1,000 people died. Besides this, many refugee camps in Gaza were viciously attacked with great loss of life.²⁷ (For a detailed discussion, see Harun Yahya, *Palestine* [Islamic Book Service: 2003].)

Conclusion

The very short list of anti-Muslim activities should be enough to stimulate to action anyone with a conscience. In fact, however, some people remain unmoved,

thinking that these practices do not immediately affect them, for they are interested only in pursuing the desires of their lower self. Even if these things happened closer to them and they became more sensitive, they would still be more concerned with their own interests. For example, if they learned that civil war had broken out in a country where they do business, their main concern would be for their potential profits as opposed to the people murdered, the children killed by cruelty, or the fear and anxiety suffered by its citizens.

These people do not care about what happens as long as it does not affect them. But if they could change places with one of the victims for only a minute, their heart would melt. If they had to fight to survive, along with seeing innocent people being murdered and forced to endure hunger and unbearable poverty, they would not be so callous and selfish.

However, believers know that the basic reason for these troubles is that people do not practice the Qur'an's moral precepts. Therefore, they consider it a matter of conscience to spread this morality among others, for being reluctant, apathetic, or unwilling to do so only prolongs the people's pain and anxiety.

In reality, the widespread nature of these problems is a sign that humanity is living in the End Times, the period that, as revealed in the hadiths of our Prophet (saas), will come before the Day of Judgment. During this time, the Qur'an's moral teachings will not be practiced and many people will live in error because they have not heard of the importance of the Qur'an's morality. At such a time, every Muslim is even more obliged to live a life of self-sacrifice as regards his or her possessions and life. In these hadiths, our Prophet (saas) tells us that strife will increase, Muslims will be oppressed and slaughtered, innocent people will be murdered, and poverty and hunger will grow worse. For example:

In the End Times, troubles from their sultans will afflict my community, so much so that all places will be problematic for Muslims. (Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Al-Burhan fi `Alamat al-Mahdi Akhir az-Zaman, p. 32)

The Hour will come when violence, bloodshed, and anarchy become common. (Muntakhab Kanz al-`Ummal)

At a time when the world will be in harj [utter confusion and disorder], fitna [strife] will appear, people will be attacked. (Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Al-Burhan fi `Alamat al-Mahdi Akhir az-Zaman, p. 12)

There will be widespread slaughter, and great strife will be seen. (Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi `Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar, p. 37)

Judgment Day will not come to pass until these things come true: death and slaughter will be widespread. (Musnad, 2:492, 4:391, 392)

Disorder, corruption, and fear will emerge in the West ... Corruption will proliferate. (Mukhtasar Tazkirah Qurtubi, p. 440)

The poor will grow in number. (Mukhtasar Tazkirah Qurtubi, p. 455)

Hunger and the high cost of living will spread as widely as they can. (Mukhtasar Tazkirah Qurtubi, p. 440)

... until innocent people are massacred, and when those on Earth and up in the sky can no longer put up with such massacres ... (Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Al-Qawl al-Mukhtasar fi `Alamat al-Mahdi al-Muntazar, p. 37)

... when Judgment Day approaches and the hearts of believers are weakened for such reasons as death, hunger, strife, the loss of the Sunnah [teachings of the Prophet (saas)], the emergence of religious novelties, and the loss of means of enjoining good and prohibiting evil. (Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Al-Burhan fi `Alamat al-Mahdi Akhir az-Zaman, p. 66)

When the occurrence of such things grows more intense, the responsibility incumbent upon Muslims also increases in importance. They must urge people to put an end to anarchy, chaos, and oppression; show them the true path; and help orphans, the poor, the abandoned, children without relatives to care for them, the aged, and those experiencing hunger and misery. Those who want to win Allah's approval must strive to improve their own moral life and solving their own problems; they must also try to solve the problems of those around them, even if this means foregoing their own preferences, sacrificing their own comfort, and parting with some of their possessions. However, the believers' hope of winning Allah's approval makes them eager to fulfill these responsibilities as best as they can.

The Qur'an states that Allah makes believers responsible for supporting those in need:

What reason could you have for not fighting in the way of Allah - for those men, women and children who are oppressed and exclaim: "Our Lord, take us out of this city whose inhabitants are wrongdoers! Give us a protector from You! Give us a helper from You!"? (Surat an-Nisa': 75)

Of course, many organizations are currently working to alleviate people's hardships. But regardless of their effectiveness, they are limited to finding superficial solutions that do not really solve the problems.

Given that these problems involve all of humanity, solutions that fix the problems for a day, a week or a month are not enough. What is needed are solutions that are permanent and final. The best solution is for the Qur'an's morality to rule people's lives, for its moral teachings enjoin people to act according to their conscience and to be tolerant, conciliatory, and understanding. It requires that justice prevail and that everyone's rights are granted in full and respected, and that the rights of innocent people, the elderly, women, children, the abandoned, and those in need are respected. Thus, implementing this morality is the clear solution to all of the world's injustice, terror, chaos, slaughter, pain, and misery.

Allah reveals this solution in the Qur'an: **"Anyone who acts rightly, male or female, being a believer, We will give them a good life and will recompense them according to the best of what they did"** (Surat an-Nahl: 97). A good life, real contentment, security, and peace can only be enjoyed fully by adhering to the Qur'an's morality. Therefore, if most people understood this truth, all of the world's pain, anxiety, murder, trouble, injustice, or poverty would cease to exist and be replaced with peace, contentment, wealth, and ease.

Together with the dominance of high morality, justice, tolerance, and self-sacrifice, one would find compassion and mercy to be widespread among the people. Everyone's rights would be granted and respected, those who are hungry would share what little they have with others, people would take care of others, and they would do their best to promote contentment among the people. In other words, any increase in the number of people who follow their conscience leads humanity one step closer to peace and contentment.

As the Qur'an reveals, the man-made oppressive systems are responsible for all of the evil in the world: **"Corruption has appeared in both land and sea because of what people's own hands have brought"** (Surat ar-Rum: 41). For this reason, each individual is responsible for turning this evil into good. If the Qur'an's morality were actually practiced, all kinds of strife would disappear. Allah tells us that those who pursue their own luxury are oppressors, and commands virtuous people with awareness to work hard and sacrifice in order to end the world's strife:

Would that there had been more people with a vestige of good among the generations of those who came before you, who forbade corruption in the land, other than the few among them whom We saved. Those who did wrong gladly pursued the life of luxury that they were given and were evildoers. (Surah Hud: 116)

Allah warns those whose moral character leads them to pursue their own luxury. Those virtuous and aware people who fear and respect Him cannot see the problems that afflict human beings and yet turn a blind eye to them in order to deal with their own concerns. They cannot put aside their responsibility to go in search of small worldly gain. In the Hereafter, Allah will hold each person accountable for knowing what to do but leaving the task to others because it seemed difficult.

In such a situation, a believer must find and join with other believers to establish the Qur'an's morality throughout the world and struggle against oppression and disorder: **"... spur on the believers..."** (Surat an-Nisa': 84)

THE EXCUSE OF PERSONAL PROBLEMS

Regardless of their own difficulties and hardships, sincere believers choose to please Allah rather than placate their lower self. However, another segment of humanity does just the opposite. In moments of trial, these people, who assert the importance of supporting believers, frequently saying that they have no other aim in life, forget their words and even retreat when they see potential hardship coming their way.

One of the major reasons for this attitude is that they dwell on their personal problems: finding a good job, starting a family, and investing for the future, among others. They consider satisfying these concerns to be more important than striving to please Allah even though the Qur'an states:

O you who believe. Do not let your wealth or children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. Whoever does that is lost. (Surat al-Munafiqun: 9)

[... who] are not distracted by trade or commerce from the remembrance of Allah, the performance of prayer, and the giving of the alms; fearing a day when all hearts and eyes will be in turmoil. (Surat an-Nur: 37)

These possessions and children are blessings from Allah. Of course, people may try to find a good job, start a family, and engage in profitable business. However, these things must never become the main goals in life or divert them from the importance of praising Allah, working toward the Hereafter, and winning His approval. On the contrary, all of these should help them attain these goals. Otherwise, as the above verse says, these things may have evil consequences and cause a person's downfall in this world and the Hereafter.

By pursuing their own interests and avoiding self-sacrifice, they cannot grasp the idea of Allah's power, His mercy and forbearance toward believers, or His protecting and helping them. Ignoring the fact that Allah sends their difficulties to test them, these people think that they have absolute power and strength. Since they think that other people can harm them, they are overwhelmed by fear. For an example, the Qur'an cites the case of those people who accompanied our Prophet (saas) to the battlefield but then wanted to retreat because they were terrified that they would be hurt. The Qur'an tells these people to trust that Allah would help them:

Remember when you left your family early in the day to install the believers in their battle stations. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. And remember when two of your clans were on the point of losing heart and Allah was their Protector. Let the believers put their trust in Allah. Allah helped you

at Badr when you were weak, so fear [and respect] Allah so that, hopefully, you will be thankful. (Surah Al 'Imran: 121-123)

At the time of our Prophet (saas), many people had no will to sacrifice and were intimidated by hardship and difficulty. This attitude is well-documented in the Qur'an, where Allah encourages people by reminding them that they can be successful only with His help: **"... and when you asked the believers: "Is it not enough for you that your Lord reinforced you with three thousand angels, sent down?"** (Surah Al 'Imran: 124). But they did not want to sacrifice, and so gave various excuses, hoping that our Prophet (saas) would allow them to stay behind:

There are only grounds [of complaint] against those who ask you for permission to stay when they are rich. They were pleased to be among those who were left behind. Allah has sealed up their hearts, so they do not know. (Surat at-Tawba: 93)

Some said that their houses were exposed, or that it was too hot, or that they could not afford it. But although they did not have the means, many of our Prophet's (saas) Companions showed their self-sacrificial spirit by joining the battle on foot. Some even wept because they could not accompany him, while others did not sacrifice even though they could, and others hid behind each other and sneaked away from the Muslims: **"Allah knows those of you who sneak away. Those who oppose his command should beware of a testing trial coming to them or a painful punishment striking them"** (Surat an-Nur: 63). However, the right thing for them to do would have been to show loyalty and faithfulness by sacrificing even when hard-pressed.

The Qur'an tells us that these people were more attached to this world: **"Would that there had been more people with a vestige of good among the generations of those who came before you, who forbade corruption in the land, other than the few among them whom We saved. Those who did wrong gladly pursued the life of luxury that they were given and were evildoers"** (Surah Hud: 116). Another verse tells us that they had broken their promises:

Yet, they had previously made a contract with Allah that they would never turn their backs. Contracts made with Allah will be asked about. (Surat al-Ahzab: 15)

This situation applies to all times. Some people claiming to have belief might avoid the responsibility of spreading the Qur'an's morality when they come up against the slightest difficulty. Caught up in their own transient worldly interests, they quickly return to thinking about their own problems. Even though they know, like all intelligent

individuals with a conscience, that they are responsible for preventing injustice, helping those in pain and those suffering from poverty and oppression, and ending this oppression by showing people the true path, such people think it more sensible to remain on the sidelines and leave this responsibility to other believers.

Allah warns those who know what they should do but do not do it: **“Do you order people to devoutness and forget yourselves, when you recite the Book? Will you not use your intellect?”** (Surat al-Baqara: 44).

The Qur'an further says that the good attitude will, Allah willing, lead a person to salvation in this world and the Hereafter: **“O you who believe. Shall I direct you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment? It is to believe in Allah and His messenger, and to strive in the way of Allah with your wealth and your selves. That is better for you if you only knew”** (Surat as-Saff: 10-11). Allah reminds us that this is better. People without real belief think that it is enough to accept a bit of religion and sacrifice only when it is convenient for them.

In the same way, they may think that it would be better for them to stay as far away as possible from difficulties and inconveniences. But Allah tells us that these people are the losers. By dwelling on their worldly concerns and personal problems, they neglect their responsibility and, later on, will realize that they have occupied themselves with vain concerns and then be overwhelmed by sorrow:

Leave them to eat and enjoy themselves. Let false hope divert them. They will soon know. (Surat al-Hijr: 3)

The kind of morality that will bring salvation in this world and the Hereafter requires people to sacrifice their personal interests and possessions, as well as to live the kind of moral life pleasing to Allah in times of hardship, sickness, and difficulty. But those who know this and, nevertheless, yield to the suggestions of their lower self and pursue their own interests and well-being will be called to account.

Of course it is irrational to jeopardize one's eternal life by not being steadfast in the face of a minor hardship and by being unwilling to sacrifice. People who fully realize this truth and know that Allah always supports those who are faithful to the Qur'an's moral precepts must willingly sacrifice their interests and shoulder their responsibilities.

Furthermore, people must never forget that living according to the Qur'an's morality wins them His love:

Many prophets have been fought when there were many thousands with him. They did not give up in the face of what assailed them in the way of Allah, nor did they weaken or yield. Allah loves the steadfast. (Surah Al 'Imran: 146)

Other Excuses for Avoiding Self-Sacrifice

Some people know what living by the Qur'an's morality entails, and yet avoid self-sacrificial acts even though they know that their attitude is wrong. Due to their weak belief, they do not use their conscious will to change their behavior; rather, they place more importance on pleasing people than winning Allah's favor. They do not care that He sees the weakness of their hearts, belief, and conscience, for their goal is to convince others of their sincerity by justifying their behavior and appeasing their own conscience. They seek to give the impression that they sincerely want to be self-sacrificial and take on responsibilities, but that there are many reasons why they cannot do so.

They know that their excuses are false and that they could find a way to sacrifice if they really wanted to. But they suppress their conscience to pursue their own interests, thinking that they will have a comfortable life if only they avoid assuming their responsibilities. But this is impossible.

Their conscience continually reminds them every time they do not please Allah and violate the Qur'an's moral teachings. They know exactly what they are doing and what the Qur'an tells them to do. Nevertheless, they ignore their responsibilities, and so will be burdened with a great responsibility in this world and the Hereafter.

Such people go to great lengths to convince others that they really want to assume their proper responsibilities, but for some reason they cannot. Therefore, in those societies where the Qur'an's morality is not practiced, the best way to gain sympathy is generally thought to convince others that one's excuses are valid. Those who actually have such a misguided idea do not measure themselves according to the Qur'an's morality, and so resort to this technique to get what they want. But believers reject this approach, for they consider the Qur'an's moral teachings as their measure in all things. The Qur'an describes a sincere attitude as one that seeks first to win Allah's favor. For this reason, believers can recognize those who hide behind excuses to avoid acts of self-sacrifice, for their excuses reveal their insincerity and weak belief.

Instead of engaging in a contest of goodness, such people only superficially adopt the Qur'an's moral teachings because, as they often claim, they *do not have the strength*. They can use this excuse in every aspect of their daily lives, all the while claiming that they are sincere and that their hearts are pure. To convince others, they do not even hesitate to swear in Allah's name: **"They will swear by Allah: 'Had we been able to, we would have gone out with you.' They are destroying their own selves. Allah knows that they are lying"** (Surat at-Tawba: 42).

In one verse, Allah refutes their claim: **"Allah does not impose on any self any more than it can stand. For it is what it has earned; against it is what it has brought upon itself"** (Surat al-Baqara: 286). The fact that they say the opposite reveals the sickness in their hearts and their intention to avoid responsibility.

This is exactly what happened with Talut (or Saul) and those who followed him when Allah sent him to the people as their ruler and promised to test them with a river. When Talut asked the people not to drink from the river, most of them could not see the purpose in this order, ignored it and fulfilled their desires. Later on, using the excuse mentioned above, they withdrew on the grounds that they did not have the strength to fight alongside Talut. But those who knew that Allah would cause them to prevail, even though they had very little strength, kept their promise and followed Talut:

When Talut marched out with the army, he said: "Allah will test you with a river. Anyone who drinks from it is not with me. But anyone who does not taste it is with me - except for him who merely scoops up a little in his hand." But they drank from it - except for a few of them. Then when he and those who believed had crossed it, they said: "We do not have the strength to face Goliath and his troops today." But those who were sure that they were going to meet Allah said: "How many a small force has triumphed over a much greater one by Allah's permission. Allah is with the steadfast." (Surat al-Baqara: 249)

Those who seek to avoid self-sacrifice sometimes maintain that *circumstances forced them into a certain situation* against their will. For example:

Those who were left behind were glad to stay behind the messenger of Allah. They did not want to strive with their wealth and themselves in the way of Allah. They said: "Do not go out to fight in the heat." Say: "The Fire of Hell is much hotter, if they only understood." (Surat at-Tawba: 81)

They wanted to hide their insincerity; however, their excuse, which they hoped would be accepted, only showed the degree of their self-deception. Allah says that He will burden an individual only with the amount of responsibility he or she can bear, and that along with the difficulty He will create the ability to endure it. Believers who know that Allah helps and supports His servants never believe that such an excuse is sincere. Just as He created the heat of the day, He also gave these people the opportunity to serve and sacrifice.

Allah can change the temperature or enable people to endure the heat. Those who hide behind insincere excuses know this. Moreover, the fact that other Muslims who face the same circumstances willingly assume their responsibility also shows the insincerity of these people.

Just as they refused to enter the struggle, they encouraged others to follow their example because *it was too hot to fight*. Others, as the Qur'an says, referred to service and self-sacrifice as "fitnah." The verse goes on to reveal their insincerity:

Among them are there some who say: 'Give me permission to stay. Do not put me to fitnah [trial].' Unquestionably, into fitnah they have fallen. Hell hems in the unbelievers. (Surat at-Tawba: 49)

Another excuse used to convince those around them is that they are occupied with the affairs of this world. Again, some of the people whom our Prophet (saas) called to support the Muslims sought to avoid that responsibility:

And a group of them said: "O people of Yathrib. Your position is untenable, so return." Some of them asked the Prophet to excuse them, saying: "Our houses are exposed," when they were not exposed. They merely wanted to run away. (Surat al-Ahzab: 13)

These people thought that they would suffer hardship, danger, and difficulty if they did what the Prophet (saas) told, and so they tried to make excuses by saying that they were needed at home, where they had important responsibilities. Allah tells us that they were lying, for they were fully aware that He was pleased with the Prophet's call and supports the believers. The verse goes on to say that their overall goal was to avoid responsibility and self-sacrifice.

They use these kinds of excuses for everything imaginable. Believers who know that people are suffering must do what they can to help, for this is part of the Qur'an's morality. But insincere people try to find a way to avoid this responsibility by claiming that they do not have the ability to help, it is the wrong time, another responsibility is more important, they are sick, or they are having financial problems. In fact, they cannot find a way to help because they have no desire to do so. This is the real purpose behind their excuses.

In the meantime, while they try to escape responsibility, the sufferers of oppression are still oppressed and continue to be crushed mercilessly under harsh conditions. But those individuals who do not heed their consciences cannot understand the severity of the situation. Instead of feeling uncomfortable, they regard it as more important to involve themselves with their own worldly concerns. They also deceive themselves into thinking that their view is that of the majority. But they must not forget that everyone will be held accountable in the Hereafter. Allah warns believers not to be influenced by such people: **"So be steadfast. Allah's promise is true. Do not let those who have no certainty make you impatient and shake your firmness"** (Surat ar-Rum: 60).

Allah also reveals a very important truth: **"So fight in the way of Allah - you are only answerable for yourself - and spur on the believers. It may well be that Allah will curb the force of those who do not believe. Allah has greater force and greater power to punish"** (Surat an-Nisa': 84).

He can remove every difficulty and hardship that may arise, and so all people who place their trust in Allah can overcome every difficulty with His help. But if they try to escape their responsibilities, they will experience pangs of suffering sent by Allah that only He can relieve. Given this fact, every person must consider these things carefully and then put sincerity and the desire to win His favor above everything else.

The Real Reasons for Avoiding Self-Sacrifice

As we saw earlier, those who think that being self-sacrificial is a loss come up with many excuses to exonerate themselves. They know that their excuses are completely insincere, and yet their overall goal is only to convince others and protect their reputation in other people's eyes. Moreover, the believers know this as well, because they use the Qur'an as their guide.

Unbelievers know that they would win Allah's favor by being responsible and self-sacrificial, but they choose to do otherwise because their hearts are filled with doubt and indecision:

What! Are they in doubt about the meeting with their Lord? What! Does He not encompass all things? (Surat al-Fussilat: 54)

They are indeed in grave doubt about it. (Surah Hud: 110)

Only those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day ask you to excuse them. Their hearts are full of doubt, and in their doubt they waver to and fro. (Surat at-Tawba: 45)

Allah warns people against Satan's wiles: **"The truth is from your Lord, so on no account be among the doubters"** (Surat al-Baqara: 147), and proclaims that those who are not overwhelmed by doubt but, regardless of the current hardship carry on with determination, find favor in His sight:

The believers are only those who have believed in Allah and His messenger, have had no doubt, and have striven with their wealth and themselves in the way of Allah. They are the ones who are true to their word. (Surat al-Hujurat: 15)

These people doubt the existence of Allah, Judgment Day, and the Hereafter, and consider the worldly interests nearer and easier advantages. They forget that Allah's justice is infinite, that He created everything, and that He helps the believers. Overwhelmed by distrust and anxiety about the future, the unbelievers forget His

promise: **“As for those who make Allah their friend, and His messenger and those who believe: it is the party of Allah who are victorious”** (Surat al-Ma’ida: 56).

One of the main reasons why people try to evade their responsibility and avoid sacrificing their interests when necessary is because they live in error and their hearts are filled with doubt.

In addition, they choose this world’s life over the Hereafter: **“These people love this fleeting world and have put the thought of a Momentous Day behind their backs”** (Surat al-Insan: 27). However, no matter how easy and attainable the world’s benefits may seem, those who know the Qur’an also know that the only permanent and enduring life is the Hereafter. But those with weak belief lay more importance on this world, for they cannot overcome their passion for its baubles. They feel some closeness to religious morality and to believers, but consider this world, their relatives, work, business, possessions, and respect to be more important than attaining Allah’s approval. They may not openly express this, but their way of life and obsession with this world show the truth:

Say: “If your fathers or sons, brothers or wives, tribe, or any wealth you have acquired or any business you fear may slump, or any house that pleases you are dearer to you than Allah and His messenger and striving in His way, then wait until He brings about His command. Allah does not guide people who are deviators.” (Surat at-Tawba: 24)

Those Arabs who remained behind will say to you: “Our wealth and families kept us occupied, so ask forgiveness for us.” They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts. Say: “Who can control Allah for you in any way, whether He wants harm for you or wants benefit for you?” Allah is aware of what you do. (Surat al-Fath: 11)

These individuals also put their own interests above winning Allah’s favor, for the fundamental insincerity of their belief causes them to believe that pursuing their own worldly interests is the most important thing in life. When they have to deal with a situation, they politely feign interest and utter a few stock phrases. In reality, however, they intend to do nothing about it.

Some people who lived in our Prophet’s (saas) time had the same kind of moral understanding:

When a sura is sent down saying: “Believe in Allah and strive together with His messenger,” those among them with wealth will ask you to excuse them, saying: “Let us remain with those who stay behind.” They are pleased to be with

those who stay behind. Their hearts have been stamped, so they do not understand. (Surat at-Tawba: 86-87)

The desert Arabs came with their excuses asking for permission to stay, and those who lied to Allah and His messenger stayed behind. A painful punishment will afflict those who do not believe. (Surat at-Tawba: 90)

This clearly shows that those people, who say that they live to win Allah's favor, are actually more interested in this life than in the Hereafter. Another reason why they avoid self-sacrifice is because they are coward. They forget that Allah is the Ruler of humanity and can create whatever and whenever He wills. Believing that people are independent of Allah and have autonomous power, they are very concerned with others' opinion of them, completely unaware that only Allah can prevent evil and bring them good. And so they try to please other people, thinking that they can either harm or benefit them in some way. But this is a great mistake, for this power belongs only to Allah, Who created every individual and determines their every action. As revealed in the Qur'an:

They will not fight against you all together as a group, except in fortified towns or behind high walls. Their hostility towards each other is intense. They are full of bravado in each other's company. You consider them united, but their hearts are scattered wide, because they are people who do not use their intellect. (Surat al-Hashr: 14)

Their fear lets them sacrifice for and support believers only if their material needs are assured and if they are sure that no one will harm them. Allah reveals several truths to these people, as follows:

Say: "Flight will not benefit you if you try to run away from death or being killed. Then you will only enjoy a short respite." Say: "Who is going to shield you from Allah if He desires evil for you or desires mercy for you?" They will find no one to protect or help them besides Allah. Allah knows the obstructers among you and those who say to their brothers, "Come to us," and who only come to fight a very little and are begrudging toward you. Then when fear comes, you see them looking at you, their eyes rolling like people scared to death. But when fear departs, they flay you with sharp tongues, grasping for wealth. Such people have no belief, and Allah will make their actions come to nothing. That is easy for Allah. (Surat al-Ahzab: 16-19)

Allah says that these people are begrudging and selfish toward believers, that they will not put themselves out, and that when they are afraid they look as if they are scared to death. Furthermore, He says that they have no belief.

Unaware of Allah's infinite power, their fear causes them to deny their resources to solve other people's problems. While they might offer some support, they do not have the courage to sacrifice their interests. For example, the people of many countries could be brought up to work together and to sacrifice for each other in order to help solve problems. In the same way, people act unjustly, oppress others, and create environments of chaos and terror because they have no fear or respect of Allah. If they were told about the proofs of His existence, the truths of belief, the existence of the Hereafter and the Day of Judgment, many would start following their conscience, a development that would ensure peace and contentment in society. Of course, radio, television, and the press play a major role in getting this message across to the masses.

Conscience demands that such people should not think only about their own advantage, but also of the needs of society. Where people's lives are hard, some people who could help and are aware of the problems refuse to help, for they place winning Allah's approval second and are afraid of being inconvenienced and suffering financial loss.

They withhold their resources because they do not want to be put in a difficult situation or face their disbelieving companions' criticism. Sometimes they do things that exalt His name, make others appreciate belief, and commend good morality, but only under pressure from their conscience and to a very limited degree so that people will not talk about them. In this way they try to placate their conscience while ignoring what will happen to them in the Hereafter. This divided attention, one part directed toward the world and the other toward the Hereafter, may not be enough to attain salvation in the Hereafter, for everyone will be held responsible as to whether or not they did all they could. Allah reveals that:

The hypocrites think that they deceive Allah, but He is deceiving them. When they get up to pray, they get up lazily, showing off to people and only remembering Allah a very little. They vacillate between the two - not joining these or joining those. If Allah misguides someone, you will not find any way for him to go. (Surat an-Nisa': 142-143)

These people also avoid service, self-sacrifice, and responsibility because they live in anxiety about the possibility of becoming poor, losing possessions, spending money, and falling into desperate poverty: **"Satan promises you poverty and commands you to avarice. Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and abundance. Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing"** (Surat al-Baqara: 268). For all of these reasons, they avoid any act of self-sacrifice.

Allah reminds us that they do not realize how great an advantage their acts of self-sacrifice would be for them in this world and the Hereafter: **"What harm would it have done them to have believed in Allah and the Last Day and to have given of what Allah has provided for them? Allah knows everything about them"** (Surat an-Nisa': 39). Believing that they have acquired their possessions by their own efforts and that they can protect them and add to them on their own, they forget that Allah, the true Owner of whatever they possess, can give them and withdraw them as He wills.

As we have seen, people do not support believers and avoid their responsibility because of their insincere belief. The weakness of their belief causes them to avoid doing religious service, practicing the Qur'an's morality, and seeking Allah's approval. But according to the Qur'an, anyone who is reluctant to worship Him will suffer grievous pangs:

The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant to Allah, nor would the angels near to Him. If any do disdain to worship Him and grow arrogant, He will, in any case, gather them all to Him. (Surat an-Nisa': 172)

As for those who believe and do right actions, He will pay them their wages in full and give them increase from His favor. As for those who show disdain and grow arrogant, He will send them a painful punishment. They will not find any protector or helper for themselves besides Allah. (Surat an-Nisa': 173)

In such a situation, believers who know the Qur'an must have the intention to act according to their conscience and practice the Qur'an's moral teachings. If they do this, Allah will both help and support them and will give them the finest reward in both worlds.

Those Who Avoid Self-Sacrifice Avoid Supporting the Sincere Believers

In the previous section, we saw that people intimidated by hardship do nothing to stop the oppression that dominates the world, help those in need, or call others to goodness and truth. However, their reluctance is so severe that they even hesitate to support anyone who is trying to fulfill their responsibilities in a way pleasing to Allah. But Allah tells the believers to help each other live in goodness and piety:

Help each other to goodness and heedfulness. Do not help each other in wrongdoing and enmity. Fear [and respect] Allah. Allah is severe in retribution. (Surat al-Ma'ida: 2)

Believers who follow virtue and their conscience strive to explain the Qur'an's moral teachings to others and end the injustice that dominates the world; those who are caught up in their own problems remain on the sidelines. Although they know that their help and support would please Allah, either their love of this world or their concern to please others prevents them from supporting those who have decided to sacrifice what they have in His cause. Seeing no advantage for themselves, these weak supporters refuse to get involved.

Some of them support the believers to a certain extent, provided that they do not have to assume any real responsibility and can, thereby, avoid facing any real worries or hardships. Many such people existed during the time of our Prophet (saas). Hypocrites try to show that they support the believers, but only until such support conflicts with their interests. Even if their interests are not harmed, they might withdraw their support due to potential hardship. Thus they leave Muslims in the lurch, forgetting that only Allah can determine what will happen to them.

Hypocritical people show the same powerlessness and insincerity when believers are falsely slandered or accused. But they know that all prophets opposed such attacks in both word and deed, for Allah states:

You will be tested in your wealth and in your selves, and you will hear many abusive words from those given the Book before you and from those who are idolaters. But if you are steadfast and guard against evil, that is the most resolute course to take. (Surah Al 'Imran: 186)

Despite this knowledge, they still abandon the believers and do not think about how they will account to Allah for what they have done. But Allah explains how believers should behave toward each other in such situations:

O you who believe. If a deviator brings you a report, scrutinize it carefully in case you attack people in ignorance and so come to greatly regret what you have done. (Surat al-Hujurat: 6)

In another verse, Allah says that when believers are slandered, they must continue to think positively:

Why, when you heard it, did you not, as men and women of the believers, instinctively think good thoughts and say: "This is obviously a lie"? (Surat an-Nur: 12)

You were bandying it about on your tongues, your mouths uttering something about which you had no knowledge. You considered it to be a trivial matter, but, in Allah's sight, it is immense. Why, when you heard it, did you not say: "We have no business speaking about this. Glory be to You! This is a terrible slander!"? (Surat an-Nur: 15-16)

Even though these people know all about such verses, they still try to justify their non-involvement when believers are slandered or face hardships. The Qur'an reveals:

Among you are people who hang back and, if you encounter a setback, say: "Allah has blessed me in that I was not there with them." (Surat an-Nisa': 72)

If good happens to you, it galls them. If a mishap occurs to you, they say: "We made our preparations in advance" and turn away rejoicing. (Surat at-Tawba: 50)

It would violate the Qur'an's moral teachings if one, when oppressed and faced with a difficulty, gave up and was happy not to be with those believers who strive to communicate to others the nature of the Qur'an's morality. Of course, believers should make every effort to banish the kind of ignorance that fosters oppression, injustice, cruelty, chaos, and disorder and replace them with the Qur'an's moral teachings, which

will establish peace, justice, and contentment. While doing so, they must be aware, patient and courageous, self-sacrificial in many things, and forge ahead undaunted by hardship or difficulty. Moreover, they can expect to be opposed every step of the way:

They will do anything to harm you. They love what causes you distress. Hatred has appeared out of their mouths, but what their breasts hide is far worse. We have made the signs clear to you, if you use your intellect. (Surah Al 'Imran: 118)

The believers are well aware of this truth.

Allah tells us that this world is a place of testing and that only those who make a sincere effort here will obtain blessings and peace in the Hereafter. Therefore, when confronted with the unbelievers' oppression and harmful actions, believers know that they have to support each other by living in accord with the Qur'an. Allah also announces that their doing so will enable them to repel the unbelievers' onslaught and that their trust in Him and patience will give them success.

So fight in the way of Allah - you are only answerable for yourself - and spur on the believers. It may well be that Allah will curb the force of those who do not believe. Allah has greater force and greater power to punish. (Surat an-Nisa': 84)

O Prophet. Spur on the believers to fight. If twenty of you are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are a hundred of you, they will overcome a thousand of those who do not believe, because they are people who do not understand. (Surat al-Anfal: 65)

Those Who Do Not Sacrifice Are Losers

The Qur'an informs us that the hypocrites rejoiced when they avoided our Prophet's (saas) call for them to sacrifice and struggle in the way of Allah: **"Those who were left behind were glad to stay behind the messenger of Allah. They did not want to strive with their wealth and their selves in the way of Allah. They said: 'Do not go out to fight in the heat.' Say: 'The Fire of Hell is much hotter, if they only understood'"** (Surat at-Tawba: 81). They were delighted, thinking that they had avoided this responsibility that would bring them no reward. Such people ignore the fact that Allah bestows whatever they possess and can withdraw it whenever He wills. Allah says that those who set traps will never win: **"When the unbelievers were planning to imprison, kill, or expel you: they were planning, and Allah was planning. However, Allah is the Best Planner"** (Surat al-Anfal: 30).

Indeed, this example provides a good lesson for those who take the Qur'an as their guide. Those who believe and live according to it never think that shirking their responsibility will give anyone an advantage, for the Qur'an states that those who think only of their own gain and thus avoid any sacrifice and opportunity to win Allah's approval will find their "reward" to be extremely limited and short-lived:

Flight will not benefit you if you try to run away from death or being killed. Then you will only enjoy a short respite. (Surat al-Ahzab: 16)

Such people may never have the opportunity to enjoy all of their possessions, or may lose all of them through a natural disaster, an illness, an accident, or some other disaster. This clear truth should cause them to wonder what reward they will receive in the Hereafter for their moral character. Moreover, Allah can turn all of their worldly possessions into sources of misery and heartache, if He so wills. And, on the Day of Judgment, He will not allow them to make excuses:

This is the Day on which they will not say a single word, nor will they be allowed to offer any excuses. (Surat al-Mursalat: 35-36)

Given this reality, all people must do everything they can to live a moral life pleasing to Allah. Postponing the decision to do so or not recognizing its importance will only result in eternal sorrow. In the Qur'an, we can read His promise to reward and support, with His mercy in both worlds, everyone who uses their possessions to win His approval:

Whatever good you give away is to your own benefit, when you give desiring only the Face of Allah. Whatever good you give away will be repaid to you in full. You will not be wronged. (Surat al-Baqara: 272)

BELIEVERS OVERCOME THEIR DIFFICULTIES THROUGH MUTUAL SUPPORT AND SELF SACRIFICE

Times of difficulty, which are generally quite rare, are actually very valuable moments created by Allah for believers to show the strength of their love, faithfulness, and submission to Him. Moreover, at the same time they can earn greater rewards for the life of the Hereafter. They may not make a special effort to encounter difficulty and hardship, but when they do they realize the reason why they occur.

The prophets sent throughout history experienced exile, oppression, danger, and sometimes even death, but they endured it all with the eager joy of belief. For example, Prophet Yusuf (as) was falsely accused and spent years in prison, leading members of Prophet Ibrahim's (as) people tried to burn him alive, Prophet Musa (as) was threatened and oppressed by Pharaoh, and Prophet Lut's (as) people tried to exile him. But each of these blessed individuals remained faithful, trusted in Allah, and submitted to Him in the face of these difficulties.

Such great men of Islam as Bediuzzaman Said Nursi placed a high value on each difficulty that they were forced to endure throughout their lives. Said Nursi, whose superior moral character will be discussed in further detail in the following pages, spent years in prison and exile and was crushed by oppression. Despite sickness, poverty, and hardship in his old age, he submitted to Allah and put his trust in Him. In his most difficult moments, he thought about the best interests of Islam and Muslims, was determined in his acts of self-sacrifice, and was an example of superior morality to his students. The sincere efforts of the Master and his followers were, by Allah's permission, an important means of imparting the Qur'an's moral teachings to the masses.

Today, all Muslims should show the same eager determination to adhere to and spread the Qur'an's moral teachings. Their difficulties should not cause them to despair; rather, they must resolve to earn the reward offered by these valuable moments in a spirit of unity and self-sacrifice. Worldly preoccupations and personal interests should never stand in the way of living by this morality, for in the Hereafter each person will be called to account for whatever good and bad deeds he or she has done.

The Qur'an tells us that the believers will be successful and that the Qur'an's morality will prevail. Allah, Who is above every defect and rich beyond need, is definitely the victor. On the other hand, a human being is a needy creature that has to win His pleasure and approval. Allah needs only to speak the word "Be" to accomplish

His will. Thus, each person must work to attain his or her salvation by assuming each responsibility and doing their best to fulfill it.

The result that Allah has determined will come to pass. Those who help in this, with His permission, will be rewarded for their efforts in His presence in the Hereafter. Those who avoid self-sacrifice, on the other hand, will be losers themselves, for they will have missed forever the opportunities and possibilities of earning the rewards that flow from sacrificing their interests.

Allah always helps those who sincerely desire to live this superior moral life and will give them success:

As for those who make Allah their friend, and His messenger and those who believe, it is the party of Allah who are victorious. (Surat al-Ma'ida: 56)

Allah has written: "I will be victorious, I and My messengers." Allah is Most Strong, Almighty. (Surat al-Mujadala: 21)

... Help comes from no one but Allah, the Almighty, the All-Wise, and so that He might cut off a group of those who do not believe or crush them and they might be turned back in defeat. (Surah Al 'Imran: 126-27)

In the pages that follow, we will look at some very good examples from the lives of our Prophet (saas) and his Companions, as well as at the self-sacrificial acts of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. We will see how great success can be attained and difficulties overcome by acting in unity and solidarity and with self-sacrifice.

Our Prophet's (saas) Self-Sacrificial Morality

The ability to act in solidarity with other people is a secret of belief that can be seen in the believers' success in the face of adversity. When we look at what has happened to them throughout history, we see that they have always been able to surmount their difficulties in this way. Beginning with our Prophet (saas) and his Companions, believers have practiced this morality. In addition, their mutual self-sacrificial support has enabled Islam and the Qur'an's morality to spread throughout the world.

Our Prophet (saas) called upon his unbelieving people to renounce their misguided beliefs and serve only Allah. While delivering this message, he endured much hardship due to his people's belief that this message would harm their interests. His people joined together against our Prophet (saas) and the believers, and did all they could to stop them. They did not agree to give up their traditional idolatry, set many traps for him, asked him to bring a revelation that would please them, and then did their best to either kill, exile, or imprison him. In order to prevent the message from influencing their people, they accused him of being crazy, practicing sorcery, being mentally

incompetent, lying, and being a poet. But our Prophet (saas) showed great patience and trust when confronted with such abuse, and always countered them with the Qur'an's moral teachings. He did not alter the Revelation or consider anyone's gain; he just obeyed Allah. Despite the continuous pressure and hardship he encountered, he continued to proclaim the message, struggle with the unbelievers, and take total responsibility for the Muslim community's physical and religious well-being.

Of course, his superior morality was an example to all Muslims. Even in the most difficult situations, he first considered what was good for Islam and his community's well-being, security, and contentment. In this regard, he showed his superior understanding of self-sacrifice. On the battlefield and in times of hunger, need, and sickness, our Prophet (saas) displayed great care for his followers and treated them with mercy and compassion.

The Companions, following Prophet Muhammad's (saas) superior understanding of self-sacrifice, showed an excellent moral character both personally and materially. Their unity and solidarity, which rested on a spirit of self-sacrifice, gave them great strength and, by Allah's mercy, enabled them to defeat the unbelievers and the hypocrites. Even though they were small in numbers, they gradually increased until Islam spread throughout Arabia.

Above all, our Prophet (saas) sacrificed greatly in regard to his personal desires by giving up what he wanted for the benefit of his community, both in this world and Hereafter. He continually gave of himself in order to educate those who were new to the Qur'an's morality. Several verses mention this:

The desert Arabs say: "We believe." Say: "You do not believe. Say rather: 'We have become Muslim,' for belief has not yet entered into your hearts. If you obey Allah and His messenger, He will not undervalue your actions in any way. Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Surat al-Hujurat: 14)

The desert Arabs are more obdurate in unbelief and hypocrisy and are more likely not to know the limits that Allah has sent down to His messenger. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. (Surat at-Tawba: 97)

Some of the desert Arabs around you are hypocrites, and some of the people of Madina are obdurate in their hypocrisy. You do not know them, but We know them. We will punish them twice over, and then they will be returned to a terrible punishment. (Surat at-Tawba: 101)

Our Prophet (saas) always responded to his people with the Qur'an's moral teachings:

Indeed, you are truly vast in character. (Surat al-Qalam: 4)

You have an excellent model in the messenger of Allah, for all who put their hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah much. (Surat al-Ahzab: 21)

If people can be patient in the face of wrong attitudes that spring from ignorance, hidden intentions, bad moral character, injustice, and nevertheless respond according to the Qur'an's morality, they are good examples of self-sacrifice. It is a sign of particular excellence if, when they are entitled to something, they can forego their rights and endure being treated unjustly. Ignorant people may not appreciate this moral excellence; in fact, they may not even notice it. But those sincere believers who seek only to win Allah's favor can be forgiving, patient, and conciliatory even when it is most difficult for them. When faced with his people's evil intentions, our Prophet (saas) sacrificed his own desires in order to win Allah's approval. He always wanted to improve them and exhort them to be good. Allah informs us of our Prophet's (saas) love for the believers, his self-sacrifice, and his good moral character:

It is a mercy from Allah that you were gentle with them. If you had been rough or hard of heart, they would have scattered from around you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them, and consult with them about the matter. Then, when you have reached a firm decision, put your trust in Allah. Allah loves those who put their trust in Him. (Surah Al 'Imran: 159)

A messenger has come to you from among yourselves. Your suffering is distressing to him. He is deeply concerned for you, gentle and merciful to the believers. (Surat at-Tawba: 128)

But because they broke their covenant, We have cursed them and made their hearts hard. They distort the true meaning of words and have forgotten a good portion of what they were reminded of. You will never cease to come upon some act of treachery on their part, except for a few of them. Yet pardon them and overlook. Allah loves good-doers. (Surat al-Ma'ida: 13)

It is reported that Aisha (ra) said, *"He was very affectionate and kind in dealing with the people."* (Imam Ghazzali's *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din*, The Book of Religious Learnings [New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2001], 2:240.) Husain (ra) is reported to tell about the Prophet's (saas) self-sacrificial moral character as follows:

I asked my father how the Prophet (saas) would sit. He replied: "The prophet of Allah would sit only in remembrance. In the same way that certain places were not allocated to him, so he would cause others to avoid so doing. When he arrived at an assembly, he would sit wherever there was empty space and would tell the Companions

to do the same. He would give his share to everyone sitting with him. Nobody sitting with him could draw the conclusion that there was anyone superior than himself in the Prophet's sight. The Prophet would be patient with anyone who sat with him or came to him with a need, and he would be the one to leave the Prophet. Whoever needed anything from the Prophet would have his need met by him or be sent away with pleasant words. His smiling face and proper moral values enriched those people.”(Yusuf Kandahlawi, Hayat al-Sahaba (Life of the Companions), vol. 1, Sentez Nesriyat, p. 28)

Another report mentions his moral superiority:

Ibrahim al-Taimi narrates on the authority of his father, who said: “We were sitting with Hudhaifa. A man said: ‘If I had been alive in the time of the Messenger of Allah (saas), I would have fought by his side and striven hard for his causes.’ Hudhaifa said: ‘You might have done that... I was with the Messenger of Allah (saas) on the night of the Battle of Abzib. We were gripped by a violent wind and severe cold. The Messenger of Allah (saas) said: ‘The man who [goes reconnoitering and] brings me news of the enemy shall be ranked with me on the Day of Judgment by Allah (the Glorious and Exalted).’ Then he said: ‘Get up Hudhaifa, [and] bring me the news of the enemy.’ Presenting myself before him, I gave him information about the enemy. When I had done so, I began to feel cold, so the Messenger of Allah (saas) wrapped me in an extra blanket with which he used to cover himself while praying. So I continued to sleep until it was morning.’” (Sahih Muslim, book 19, no. 4412)

Together with his matchless moral character, our Prophet (saas) devoted his life and his possessions to Allah: **Say: “My prayer and my rites, my living and my dying, are for Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds”** (Surat al-An'am: 162). He did this so that the Qur'an's morality could spread everywhere, thereby enabling contentment, peace, and love to prevail among all people. He was eager to achieve this end and, content in his submission to Allah, put up with all kinds of hardship.

Our Prophet (saas) spent three years secretly proclaiming his message with great caution. Many people accepted Islam and the number of Muslims was growing. At the end of three years, by Allah's command, he openly announced Islam and his prophethood to the Quraysh. These unbelievers became hostile and initiated a pitiless struggle with him that consisted of trying to silence him by resorting to all kinds of cruelty and even attempted murder. Led by Abu Lahab, Umm Jamil (Abu Lahab's wife), and Abu Jahl, the leading men of the Quraysh fought to stop him.

But all of their efforts were in vain. This made the Makkan unbelievers and tribal leaders very uneasy. Despite this opposition, however, the number of Muslims grew daily and the neighboring tribes began to accept Islam. The conversion of such people as Umar (ra) and Hamza (ra) and the subsequent strengthening of Islam greatly worried them. Seeing that they could not deter conversions by torture and violence, and that they could not prevent Islam's spread, they and their allies tried to suppress Muslims and their allies through a complete trade and social boycott.

They attached this decision to the wall of the Ka'bah, and soon all Makkans complied. As a result, Muslims moved away to live together. The unbelievers would not allow any food to reach them and allowed them to come to the market to buy food only during the pilgrimage season. Even then, standing on the corners, the Makkans would do all they could to make their purchases difficult. Sometimes they threatened the merchants, bought up all of their stock, or met caravans bringing food to Makkah before they arrived and did their best to turn them against the Muslims.

As a result, the Muslims suffered terrible hunger and famine. His uncle Abu Talib and his wife Khadija (ra) sold of all their possessions to meet the Muslims' needs. Despite three years of anxiety, hunger, and famine, the unbelievers could not prevent the spread of Islam. Under these harsh conditions and with great self-sacrifice, the Prophet (saas) perfectly carried out his duty of spreading the message.

Three years later, the leaders of the Quraysh ended the boycott but not their efforts against the Muslims. Abu Talib was one of the influential figures in Makkah and, although he did not become a Muslim, both he and Khadija (ra) supported Prophet Muhammad (saas) from the beginning. When they died, the Quraysh gained courage and increased their opposition. Due to Abu Talib's position within the tribe and the protection he extended to the Prophet (saas), the Qurayshi leaders had hesitated to move against our Prophet (saas). But now that Abu Talib was dead, they resorted to all manner of pressure, suppression, torture, threats, and cruelty to stop him and prevent the Muslims from practicing their religion.

After ten years of preaching, the still increasing levels of verbal and physical oppression caused our Prophet (saas) to decide to address the tribes who lived outside of Makkah. With Zayd ibn Harith (ra), he went to Ta'if to invite the Thaqif tribe to accept Islam and protect the Muslims from the Qurayshi unbelievers. He stayed with them for ten days, explaining Islam to the tribal leaders. But the people of Ta'if worshipped Lat, and none of them accepted his message. He spoke to each leader individually, but saw that they were ignorant, arrogant, and hostile, and endured their bad treatment with great patience.

Our Prophet (saas) tried every way to protect the Muslims living in Makkah, where each Muslim was living under the threat of death, torture, starvation, or exile. He showed his superior moral character by walking to Ta'if and doing all he could to show them the true way. Even though they treated him badly, he endured all of these things so that Islam would spread and the Muslims would be secure.

When he returned to Makkah, our Prophet (saas) saw that the Muslims were more oppressed than ever. So, he began to preach the message to the Arab tribes who visited Makkah to perform the pilgrimage in its proper season and to attend Makkah's periodic festivals. He explained the Qur'an to them and invited them to accept Islam with great patience and trust, all the while enduring whatever abuse was thrown at him by Abu Lahab and other unbelievers.

In the eleventh year, a group of six Madinan travelers embraced Islam. Respected and influential members of their tribes, they returned to Madinah and called their relatives to Islam. After a short time, Islam spread throughout Madinah. In the two pilgrimage seasons following this event, the Madinans returned to Makkah to speak with our Prophet (saas) and pledged their allegiance. When the Makkans learned of this, they increased their oppression and tried to make it impossible for the Muslims to live in the city. Given this reality, Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad (saas) that the Muslims should move to Madinah. Worried that the Makkan and Madinan Muslims would form a very strong union, the Makkan unbelievers tried to prevent the Muslims from leaving. They arrested and tortured some and intercepted others.

Until a command came from Allah, our Prophet (saas), together with Abu Bakr (ra) and Ali (ra), remained in Makkah. Unaware that Allah was protecting the Prophet (saas), Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab, and other unbelieving leaders decided to organize more verbal and physical assaults against him. In this instance, they chose a strong man from each tribe and decided to set yet another trap in order to kill him. Since all of them would be involved, they thought that our Prophet's (saas) tribe would be unable to respond:

When those who do not believe were planning to imprison, kill, or expel you. They were planning and Allah was planning, but Allah is the best Planner. (Surat al-Anfal: 30)

But Allah protected the Prophet (saas) from this trap. After this event, they sent out armed men to intercept him and Abu Bakr (ra), who were now on their way to Madinah. Allah foiled this trap as well:

If you do not help him, Allah helped him when the unbelievers drove him out and there were two of them in the cave. He said to his companion: "Do not be despondent, [for] Allah is with us." Then Allah sent down His serenity upon him and reinforced him with troops you could not see. He made the word of those who did not believe the lowest [of the low]. The word of Allah is the uppermost. Allah is Almighty, All-Wise. (Surat at-Tawba: 40)

Of course, the unbelievers were not content to limit their traps to this one. Their leaders, among them Abu Lahab, Umm Jamil, and Abu Jahl, did whatever they could to make things difficult for our Prophet (saas) and suppress him. They even tried to kill him. Allah tells us in the Qur'an about the consequences they will face for their unseemly bold actions against our Prophet (saas) and the true religion:

Ruin to the hands of Abu Lahab and ruin to him! His wealth has not helped him, nor anything he has earned. He will burn in a Flaming Fire. And so will his wife, the firewood-carrier, with a rope of twisted fibre round her neck. (Surat al-Masad: 1-5)

While struggling against the prevailing idolatry of his fellow Arabs, our Prophet (saas) served as a role model for all believers of adhering to the Qur'an's morals, self-sacrifice, determination, and trust in Allah. Many hadiths mention his superior moral character and generosity:

Ibn 'Abbas said: "The Prophet (saas) was the most generous ... Verily, the Messenger of Allah (saas) is more generous at giving bounty or charity than the blowing wind." (Sahih al-Bukhari)

Jabir (ra) said: "The Prophet (saas) would never deny anything he was asked for." (Sahih al-Bukhari, 1:503)

Anas reported that the Prophet (saas) was the best of people, the most generous of people, and most courageous of people. (Sahih al-Bukhari)

"If the mountain of Uhud turns into gold for me [Muhammad], I will not let three nights pass with even a dinar for myself." (Sahih al-Bukhari)

In another hadith, our Prophet (saas) told Aisha (ra):

"Do not turn away a poor man ... even if all you can give is half a date. If you love the poor and bring them near you ... Allah will bring you near Him on the Day of Resurrection." (Hadith at-Tirmidhi, 1376)

Another hadith speaks of his superior moral character in this regard:

He was the most modest, was without pride, and his tongue was most eloquent without prolongation of speech. His constitution was the most beautiful. (Imam Ghazzali, Ihya' `Ulum ad-Din, 2: 237-41)

Our Prophet (saas) also urged believers to be generous:

In one sermon, after giving thanks to Allah, he said: "O people! Know that Almighty Allah has chosen Islam for you as the religion. Adorn your Islam with generosity and moral virtues. I wish you to know that generosity is a tree of paradise whose roots are in paradise and whose branches are in this world. Those of you who are generous will have clung to one of those branches, and that branch will take them to paradise. As for parsimony, that is a tree with its roots in hell and its branches in this world. It will carry to hell he who clings to one of its branches by being parsimonious." The Prophet (saas) later twice said, "Be generous on the path of Allah." (Yusuf Kandahlawi, Hayat al-Sahaba, Hz. Muhammed ve Ashabın Yaşadığı İslami Hayat (Life of the Companions: The Islamic Life of Prophet Muhammad and His Companions), vol. 2, Sentez Nesriyat, Temel Eserler Serisi: 2/2, p. 192)

The Companions' (ra)

Self-Sacrificial Character

Prophet Muhammad (saas) and all of the other prophets engaged in a determined, courageous, and self-sacrificial struggle to spread true religion and establish the Qur'an's morality. A similar struggle dominated the lives of those people who accepted Muhammad (saas) as a prophet while he was still alive: the Companions. They gave him great material and personal support, and their moral character continues to inspire all believers even today. They are honored for their courage and determination, as well as for their strong faith and unconditional loyalty to Allah and His Prophet (saas). Even under the most difficult circumstances, they sought Allah's approval by putting their own desires second to those of the Prophet (saas). They left their former lives behind without a second thought and, in spite of the ensuing threats and pressure, accepted the true religion, along with the ensuing difficulties and distress, for the sake of winning Allah's approval.

Some of them belonged to powerful tribes, while others were slaves of the unbelievers. They all knew that they would meet with all manner of verbal and physical attacks, false accusations, cruelty, and torture. Although they had seen many instances of this, they did not hesitate to obey the call of the Prophet (saas). They suffered many assaults from the unbelievers but this did not deter them from following the true path. They took refuge in Allah, and patiently entrusted themselves to Him. From that time on, they remained steadfast in their belief and in their hope that Allah would keep them safe.

Joining themselves to him in love and loyalty, they supported him and were sincere in their attempts to spread His religion and the Qur'an's morality. In addition, they considered all of the ensuing hostility as a blessing and a way to attain Allah's mercy. In fact, they even counted being wounded and killed as positive means to this end: **Say: "What do you expect to befall us, except for one of the two best things? But what we expect to happen to you is for Allah to punish you either directly from Himself or through our hands. So wait. We are waiting with you"** (Surat at-Tawba: 52). Their love of Allah and the Prophet (saas) enabled them to show extraordinary courage, determination, and eagerness.

These people immediately answered Allah's call and remained true to their promises to the end: **[Believers say:] "Our Lord, we heard a caller calling us to faith: 'Believe in your Lord!' and we believed. Our Lord, forgive us our wrong actions, erase our bad actions, and take us back to You with those who are truly good"** (Surah Al 'Imran: 193). They gave up their worldly possessions without a second thought to inaugurate Islam's peace, contentment, and further spread among their people. One hadith records Asad ibn Zurara's words about the Companions' determined loyalty:

"O, Prophet of Allah. ... Whoever Allah wishes to be on the true path and whoever seeks good in all affairs, all of these things will be easy for them. We responded to you

with all we have, believed in what you brought, and approved the knowledge of Allah installed in our hearts. We swear allegiance to you in this regard. We swear allegiance to our Lord and yours. The hand of Allah is above our hands. Our blood is before your blood. Our hands are under your hands. From whatever we protect our own selves, our children, and our women, so do we protect you from them. If we fulfill these promises, we do this for Allah and we thank Him for it. O Prophet of Allah, I speak these words in all sincerity. Help comes only from Allah."²⁸

At the time of the battle of Badr, during the second year of the Prophet's (saas) residence in Madinah, the tiny Muslim community was unprepared for war. However, the Companions' courage and willingness to sacrifice what they valued did not lessen. By declaring that they *"will not hold back from any act of service or self-sacrifice,"*²⁹ Abu Bakr (ra) and Umar (ra) expressed their dedication to the Prophet (saas). All of the other Companions were just as eager and determined. For example, Miqdad ibn al-Aswad, a cavalryman whom the Prophet (saas) praised as being worth a thousand soldiers, never compromised his belief in Allah despite all of the torture unleashed against him. In fact, he said:

*O Prophet of Allah. Tell us what Allah commands us [to do], and we will obey you. We do not say, as the Jews said to Prophet Musa: "You go with your Lord and fight the enemy! ... We will wait here." All of us are ready to fight on your right, on your left, before you, and behind you.*³⁰

In all things, the Companions knew that **"The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves"** (Surat al-Ahzab: 6) and so risked their lives to protect him. One Companion, Sammas ibn Uthman al-Makhzumi, who is still remembered for his high moral character, threw himself in front of someone who was going to strike the Prophet (saas) from behind during the Battle of Uhud and was martyred.

Many other Companions, all of whom had a profound belief in Allah and a firm love for the Prophet (saas), showed the same moral character. Some of them died while protecting him, while others were gravely wounded and yet continued to think of his safety and security before their own.

After Abu Bakr (ra) and Uthman (ra), Talha ibn Ubaydullah had the honor of being among the first Muslims. For this reason, he endured torture. But during the battle of Uhud, this great hero protected the Prophet (saas). When all of the Companions fighting by the Prophet's (saas) side lay dead, only Talha was left to protect him. He continued to do so, despite his many sword wounds.

In order to prevent Malik ibn Zubayr from wounding the Prophet (saas) with his arrows, Talha shielded the Prophet (saas) with his hand. As a result, he lost all of his fingers. He had around eighty wounds on him, and yet never deserted the Prophet's (saas) side. When Abu Bakr (ra) and Sa`ad ibn Abi Waqqas came to the Prophet's (saas) side, Talha fainted from a loss of blood. When he came to himself, he cared only about the Prophet (saas):

Our beloved Prophet (saas) told Abu Bakr to run at once to help Talha. Abu Bakr sprinkled holy water over Talha's face to bring him around. As soon as Talha awoke he asked: "O, Abu Bakr. How is the Prophet?" [Abu Bakr replied:] "The Prophet is well. It was he who sent me." [Talha said:] "Infinite thanks to Allah. If he is alive, all sufferings are as nothing."

As we can see, the Companions competed in sincerity and faithfulness among themselves for the honor of shielding the Prophet (saas). As a result, Allah made them a source of inspiration for all Muslims. Their sincere struggle, sincere joy of belief, love for Allah, and dedication to the Prophet (saas) led to Islam's rapid spread throughout the world (by Allah's permission) and to mass conversions.

When we look at their lives, we see that all of them, just like Talha, first thought of the Prophet (saas), other Muslims, and the spread of Islam regardless of their own personal circumstances. Even in the arms of death, their first questions were about his security, the condition of the Muslims, and whether or not the battle had been won. Good news with regard to these things cheered them.

One of the finest examples of this moral character was found in an-Nu`man ibn Muqarrin al-Muzani, who joined the Prophet (saas) in the defeat of Makkah and the Battle of Hunayn. This commander died during an expedition that Umar (ra) ordered against Iran. But even as he lay dying, his main concern remained the Muslim community's security and success. Telling others not to worry about him, he urged the soldiers to continue fighting:

Nu`man ibn Muqarrin mounted his horse and toured the troops. He stopped beside every standard and encouraged them to battle. He then said: "If anyone is martyred, even myself, let nobody gather around him. Let nobody hang back from the attack." A fierce battle took place. Nu`man, commander of the army of Islam, fell. "Place a garment over me, attack the foe without waiting, and do not let my state alarm you or cause you to relax."

When Nu`man was wounded and fell, I went to his side. Remembering his words that nobody should lose time with anyone else, even for him, I did not linger. The Persian army was defeated. The battle was over. I went to Nu`man. He was about to die. He asked me: "What did the Muslims do?" [I replied:] "Allah gave us victory." [He said:] "Alhamdulillah!" Nu`man ibn Muqarrin then breathed his last and expired.

Other examples of great self-sacrifice can be seen in those Companions, regardless of age, whose love for Allah, enthusiasm for His religion, and faithfulness to the Prophet (saas) made them desire to follow him into battle. Abu Sa`id al-Khudri, who had been too young to fight at Badr, asked the Prophet (saas) to let him fight at Uhud. However, the Prophet (saas) told him to stay in Madinah with the other children.

Abd-Allah ibn al-Zubayr was 12 years old when he fought in the Battle of Yarmuk, and four years later he participated in the defeat of Egypt. This young man's enthusiasm and courage have remained examples to all Muslims. Also, the elderly and

crippled Amr ibn al-Jamuh was so convinced of Islam's truth and so desired to win Allah's approval that he asked our Prophet (saas) to let him fight at Uhud. His request was granted, and he was martyred there. Abu Talha fought alongside the Prophet (saas) until the latter's death, and then alongside Abu Bakr (ra) and Umar (ra) until they died. Despite his advanced years, he insisted on fighting one more battle and, during the ensuing sea battle, was killed.³⁶ We can see that these blessed people spent their whole lives striving to win Allah's approval and, despite their age, they were so inspired by Islam that they found enough physical strength to fight.

In addition to the children and old men, another group of Companions stands out because of their faithfulness, courage, and self-sacrifice: pious women. One of them, Umm `Umara Nasiba bint Kaab distributed water to the warriors and bandaged their wounds. Earlier, at Aqaba, she had participated in the oath-taking ceremony that "they would protect Allah's Prophet (saas) like they protected themselves, their women, and their children." Seeing that the battle was going against the Muslims and that the enemy was pressing on the Prophet of Allah (saas), she took up a sword to defend him. Along with some other Companions, she used her body to shield him and received many wounds.

Ikrima ibn Abi Jahl always put the Prophet's (saas) safety before that of himself, his tribe, and his relatives. He fought at Yarmuk against the Byzantines during Abu Bakr's (ra) reign. The Muslims were victorious, but he, along with al-Harith ibn Hisham and Suhayl ibn Amr, were seriously wounded. History records their self-sacrifice:

Al-Harith ibn Hisham, Suhayl ibn Amr, and Ikrima ibn Abi Jahl were seriously wounded and fell at the battle of Yarmuk. Al-Harith asked for water to drink. One of the soldiers brought him some water. Seeing that Ikrima was looking at him, he said: "Take this water to Ikrima." As Ikrima was taking the water, he saw that Suhayl was looking at him. He did not drink the water, but said: "Take this water and give it to Suhayl." But Suhayl died before he could reach him. At this, the water-bearer ran to Ikrima. But Ikrima had also died. He immediately rushed to al-Harith, but al-Harith had also died.

We can see that the Companions, when at the point of death and in moments of extreme need, thought first of their fellow Muslims. Without a doubt, this great self-sacrifice came from their firm belief in Allah and the Hereafter and their sincere submission to Him.

The Companions were never daunted by their difficulties. Even though they might have been justified in not fighting in His way because of their own needs and distress, they made no excuses. They were always eager to do as much as they could and to spend all their personal and material strength. One of the best exemplars of this attitude is Zayd ibn Suhvan. While fighting at Qadisiyyah, where 600 Muslims were killed, he was wounded and lost his arm. But he wanted to continue fighting, because his belief was so strong. 'Ilba' ibn Jahsh-al'Ijli, who was seriously wounded at Qadisiyyah, also continued to fight until he died.

Wounded people may be concerned about themselves and try to escape further harm. But this was not true of the Companions. Knowing that whatever danger they faced was for their own good, they insisted on struggling as best they could in order to win Allah's favor. They continued fighting even when they were wounded and knew that they were dying, for they saw death as something good and welcomed martyrdom. For this reason, they never retreated from the struggle to carry out Allah's will.

This attitude is exemplified by Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, who fought alongside the Prophet (saas) at Dhat-ur-Riqa`:

*Al-Bukhari, on the authority of Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari, narrated that they set out on an expedition with the Messenger of Allah. "We were six in number and had (with us) only one camel which we rode turn by turn. Our feet were injured. My feet were so badly injured that my nails came off. We, therefore, bandaged our feet with rags, so this expedition was called Dhat-ur-Riqa` (i.e. the expedition of rags.)"*⁴¹

Mus'ab ibn Umayr, who carried the Muslim standard and had stayed by our Prophet's (saas) side at Uhud, is an important role model of determined self-sacrifice. After he lost his right arm, he raised the standard in his left arm. When he lost that arm, he made his body a shield to defend the Prophet (saas). He eventually was killed by a spear.

Qatada ibn Nu'man is also known for his devotion and self-sacrifice toward our Prophet (saas):

The Prophet had been given a bow. On the Day of Uhud, he gave that bow to me. I remained by the Prophet's side, shooting arrows with it, until it no longer served any purpose. Then, for the whole day, I made myself a shield against any arrows that might strike him. An arrow fired at him would find me before hitting its target. Eventually, an arrow came and one of my eyeballs protruded...

On the Day of Uhud, I protected the Prophet's face with my face, and Abu Dujana Simak, an Ansari, protected his back with his own back. That day, many arrows struck Abu Dujana's back.

Ibn Ishaq narrates an example of the self-sacrificial enthusiasm that Muslims displayed, committed to winning Allah's approval:

I was present at the Battle of Uhud. My brother was also there. We both left the battle wounded. When the Prophet's herald declared: "Everyone will follow the enemy," I said to my brother: "Let's not miss fighting together with the Prophet." I swear to Allah, we had no animal to ride and were both severely wounded. We set out together with the Prophet. But I was less heavily wounded than my brother. When he fell exhausted, I carried him a little on my back, and he walked a little. This went on until the Muslims reached their destination.

The Qur'an announces the good news of Paradise to all sincere Muslims who, like the Companions, voluntarily sacrifice their own interests and possessions to win Allah's approval:

Their Lord responds to them: “I will not let the deeds of any doer among you go to waste, male or female - you are both the same in that respect. Those who migrated and were driven from their homes, and who suffered harm in My way and fought and were killed, I will erase their bad actions and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing under them, as a reward from Allah. The best of all rewards is with Allah.” (Surah Al 'Imran: 195)

The Companions’ Self-Sacrifice in Giving Alms

In many respects, the Companions led very difficult lives, for they were the first Muslims in a very traditional society of hostile unbelievers. Thinking that their ancestral religion would be harmed, the unbelievers spared no effort to silence the believers, divert them from their faith, and even kill them.

Subjected to all sorts of psychological pressure, cruelty, torture, and accusations, they lived much of their lives under the threat of death and, as revealed in the Qur’an, struggled with terrible fear, starvation, and oppression. This treatment lasted for years, during which all business, trade, and sometimes even social relations were severed. In addition, some of their families and tribes excluded them. Sometimes they could find nothing to eat, and thus had to endure starvation and thirst, as well as cold and the sicknesses that such conditions cause. But they endured all of these things willingly and courageously, for they knew that Allah was testing them and that if they were successful, they would win His approval: **“We will test you with a certain amount of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and life and fruits. But give good news to the steadfast”** (Surat al-Baqara: 155). By acting in unity, and with a spirit of solidarity, not to mention using all of their possessions in His path, they overcame their adversities.

They did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives and possessions, and were exemplary sacrificers of their own interests. Their total belief in Allah and the Hereafter prevented them from considering giving what they had to others as a loss; on the contrary, they regarded each opportunity to do so as an opportunity to win His love and approval. As Allah says: **“And how is it with you that you do not give in the way of Allah, when the inheritance of the heavens and Earth belongs to Him? Those of you who gave and fought before the victory are not the same as those who gave and fought afterwards. They are higher in rank. But to each of them Allah has promised the best. Allah is aware of what you do”** (Surat al-Hadid: 10).

The Qur’an also stresses the important role of piety and pure intention: ***“Their flesh and blood do not reach Allah, but your heedfulness does reach Him. In this way, He has subjected them to you so that you might proclaim Allah’s greatness for the way that He has guided you. Give good news to the good-doers”*** (Surat al-Hajj: 37). Someone with many possessions can find many occasions for

sacrificial giving, while someone with more restricted means may have more limited opportunities. But if their intentions are pure, the latter group's sacrificial giving will also be well-rewarded, for one's reward in the Hereafter depends upon one's sincerity.

When we look at the Companions' deeds, we must realize that their sincerity was more important than what or how much they gave. All of them strove with whatever they had:

Each person faces a particular direction, so race each other to the good. Wherever you are, Allah will bring you all together. Truly, Allah has power over all things. (Surat al-Baqara: 148)

At a time when the unbelievers forced the Muslims to endure the constant threat of starvation, thirst, cold, sickness, oppression, and torture, they donated their vineyards and gardens, wells, houses and food, and material possessions. Talha ibn Ubaydullah, mentioned above, was a prime example of this attitude. At a time when Muslims were in greatest need, he bought a well and offered it to them:

So that the Muslims would not suffer thirst during the battle of Dhil Qarada, Talha bought a well and donated it to the faithful. At that time, buying and donating a well was an act of enormous generosity. By himself, he fed the combatants during the Battle of 'Usra. His daily income was a thousand pieces of gold. He watched over the orphaned, met the needs of the poor, and helped the helpless. He gave money to the needy. All of the needs of the Banu Taym [tribe] were met with his help. Talha found husbands for their widows and paid the debts of the indebted.

Abu Talha, who came from one of Madinah's richest families, gave all he had to win Allah's approval and showed the same fine moral qualities:

Malik related to me that Ishaq ibn Abdullah ibn Abi Talha heard Anas ibn Malik say: "Abu Talha had the greatest amount of property in palm-trees among the Ansar in Madinah. His dearest piece of property was Bayruha, which was in front of the mosque. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, used to go into it and drink from the pleasant water that was in it."

Anas continued: "When the verse 'You will not obtain rightness of action until you expend of what you love,' (Surat al-Baqara: 176), Abu Talha went to the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and said: 'O Messenger of Allah. Allah, the Blessed, the Exalted, has said: "You will not obtain rightness of action until you expend of what you love." The property which I love the best is Bayruha. It is sadaqa [alms] for Allah. I hope for its good and for it to be stored up with Allah. Place it wherever you wish, O Messenger of Allah.'"

Another Companion noted for his generous spirit was Sa'd ibn Ubada. When our Prophet (saas) moved to Madinah, he spent seven months in his house. Sa'd prayed to

Allah for the means to be generous, and his self-sacrifice is related in the following episode:

In the years of famine and drought, Sa`d ibn Ubada provided food for the people, helped those stranded by the wayside, welcomed guests in the finest manner, helped in the times of want and need, and assisted the tribes in reaching their homes. At the Garad expedition, which took place in 627, he gave the army ten camel loads of dates as provisions, and gave food to the entire army during its campaign against the Banu Qurayza which took place immediately after the Battle of Khandaq. Sa`d ibn Ubada also owned a castle. Here, he gave food and drink to 80 poor Companions without families, known as the People of Suffa. He also had a well dug and placed it at the Muslims' disposal.

S`ad ibn Ubada and Sa`d ibn Muadh, two of the most eminent members of the Aws and Khazraj tribes, rendered great services to Islam. Their services and the sacrifices they made for Muslims were truly astonishing. They rendered the greatest services with their property and lives, with nothing left they did not sacrifice for this purpose. Sa`d ibn Ubada, one of the most prominent Companions, always served Islam and encouraged Madinah's Muslims to sacrifice for and serve Islam.

Al-Arqam ibn Abi'l-Arqam, who belonged to one of Makkah's richest and most influential families, was one of the first people to accept the Prophet's (saas) message. At this time, when the small Muslim community was praying in secret, Arqam offered his house, located on the Ka`bah's west side, to our Prophet (saas) for the Muslims' use. This was a great blessing for the Muslims. Our Prophet (saas) and about 10-15 believers moved into this house and used it as a safe place in which they could pray and from which they could spread Islam. They stayed in that house for three years, delivering the message and welcoming new converts. This house played an important role in the history of Islam, for as many as forty Companions, including Umar (ra), stayed there. When we consider the Muslims' difficult situation at that time, we can better understand just how important Arqam's generosity was.

Abu Bakr (ra), in addition to his fine moral character, is another excellent example of self-sacrificial behavior. He willingly gave all of his possessions at a time when Muslims were perhaps most in need, in order to strengthen them and aid the spread of Islam. In fact, he was the first person to give alms specifically for this cause:

In times of peace and of campaign, Abu Bakr never abandoned the Prophet (saas). He always accompanied him. He was always at his side, ready to sacrifice his property and life. Abu Bakr, our Prophet's first successor [caliph], was ever at the forefront in giving up his assets in order to strengthen the religion and fighting the enemy.

When the Prophet (saas)told everyone to help out in the Battle of Tabuk, everyone donated a part of their property. Then Abu Bakr handed over his property. The Prophet (saas)turned to him and asked: "O Abu Bakr, have you left anything at home?" [Abu

Bakr replied:] "O, Prophet, I have left nothing at home. I have brought it all here. I have left them with Allah and His Prophet."

The Prophet also asked Umar, who had donated half of his possessions, whether he had left anything for his family. "Yes, I have brought only half of my possessions," he replied. "The other half I have left for them." When Umar heard that Abu Bakr had brought all that he possessed, he said: "He has surpassed me in all auspicious deeds in which we have contended."

Although Abd ar-Rahman ibn Awf was one of the richest Companions, he had no love of possessions and attached no importance to them or to his wealth. For him, living as a Muslim was the only thing that mattered. He fought alongside our Prophet (saas) in all of the battles, gave away many of his possessions to help the Muslim community, freed his captives after the battle of Uhud, and distributed a lot of his gold among them. He provided many horses and loaded camels for the Tabuk campaign.⁵⁰ Ibn Abbas relates:

Six months after returning from Ta'if, I went to the Prophet (saas). Allah commanded him to embark on the Tabuk campaign. This was at the time of the fiercest heat in Hijaz. There were large numbers of hypocrites. Moreover, the people of the Suffa had also increased considerably at that time. Staying in a house next to the mosque, they survived on the alms given by the Prophet (saas) and other believers. When hostilities broke out, the Muslims divided them among themselves. Those Muslims with sufficient means agreed to feed four people or to militarily equip one. Then they all went off to fight together. In this campaign, the Prophet (saas) commanded the Muslims to spend their assets in Allah's way and earn His approval. They abided by that command and spent their assets in order to attain His mercy. Mounts were provided for some poor Muslims, but some were left on foot. That day, Abd ar-Rahman ibn Awf donated 200 uqiyya of money [1 uqiyya is a measure of weight equivalent to 40 dirhams]. This was the day's greatest donation. The Prophet (saas) asked him: "Have you left anything for your family?" He replied: "Yes, I have left them more than what I have given." When the Prophet (saas) asked: "What have you left them?" Abd ar-Rahman replied: "The goodwill and auspiciousness promised by Allah and His Messenger."

Like all of the Companions, Uthman (ra) obeyed the Prophet's (saas) call during the Tabuk campaign. He equipped one-third of the army and spent, in this way, more than others for His cause. In fact, one account says that after his contribution, the army needed nothing else. Once when there was a famine in Madinah, Uthman (ra) bought for the Companions a 100-camel caravan loaded with wheat from Damascus. Later, he distributed all of it free of charge to the poor and the Companions in Madinah. He then killed the camels and distributed the meat to the poor.

Another Companion known for his generosity was Abd-Allah ibn Umar, the son of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (ra). One account mentions his moral character:

*Abd-Allah ibn Umar did not die until he emancipated a thousand people. He gave anything that he began to love to the needy for the sake of Allah. In this way, he labored according to: “**You will not attain true goodness until you give of what you love**” (Surah Al 'Imran: 92).*

Allah announces the following good news to all Muslims who show the same moral qualities as the Companions did:

Anyone, male or female, who does right actions and is a believer, will enter the Garden. They will not be wronged by so much as the tiniest speck. (Surat an-Nisa': 124)

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and Self-Sacrifice

Who is Bediuzzaman Said Nursi?

Said Nursi was among the greatest Islamic scholars and men of ideas in recent history. He was born in 1873 in the village of Nurs (Bitlis province) and died in Sanliurfa, Turkey in 1960. He embraced religion at a young age and was accepted in scholarly circles due to his deep knowledge of the positive sciences. From his youth, he was noted for his keen mind, retentive memory, and superior abilities. As a result, he became known as Bediuzzaman, which means “the wonder of the age.”

Said Nursi saw that the most pressing need in eastern Turkey was education. Desiring to do something about it, he went to Istanbul in 1907 to establish the Madrasat al-Zahra university, where courses in religion and other branches of learning would be taught. His deep learning gained him quick acceptance among Istanbul's scholarly circles, and he began to publish articles in newspapers and magazines and support the government in arguments about freedom and constitutional monarchy.

The government was not interested in his request regarding the university. Moreover, it was uneasy about the interest some scholars, students, university teachers, and politicians showed in him and managed to send him first to a mental hospital and then to prison. Shortly after he was released, on July 23, 1908, the second constitution was announced. In Istanbul, he gave speeches on how the concepts of freedom and constitutional monarchy did not contradict Islam, and also sent signed telegraphs to the tribal leaders in eastern Anatolia. But even though his speeches and articles had a calming effect, he was arrested in 1909 on false charges on 31 March incident, but was later released.

After this incident, he returned to eastern Anatolia region of Turkey. When World War I broke out, he and his students fought in a territorial militia that he had founded. He served as a volunteer regimental commander and was captured in Russia. After three years in a Siberian prison camp, he escaped and returned to Istanbul.

Many of Istanbul's high state officials and scholarly circles were interested in him, and eventually he was made a member of the Islamic Academy. He used his salary to

publish and distribute his own books for free. During the occupation of Istanbul, Said Nursi, who defended and supported the national struggle, revealed these forces' true intentions in a brochure entitled *Hutuwat-al Sitte* (The Six Steps of Satan). As a result, the commander of the British occupying forces ordered that he be found and brought back dead or alive. However, his activities pleased the National Assembly founded in Anatolia, and he was invited to Ankara. Arriving there in 1922, he was given a formal state reception. However, he rejected its request that he become an official public preacher, a member of the Assembly, or the director of the Department of Religious Affairs.

In 1925, a man by the name of Sheikh Said rebelled against Ankara. Although Said Nursi had no involvement in the rebellion, he was removed from Van and taken to Burdur, and, later on, exiled to Barla (Isparta province). There, he wrote the greater part of his magnum opus: the *Risale-i Nur*.

In 1934, those who saw the *Risales* as their greatest obstacle wanted to bring Said Nursi to the center of Isparta, where they could keep him under closer control. He continued his work there. In 1935, the police searched his house and confiscated all of his books. In addition, he was arrested and questioned, but was released when no incriminating evidence could be found. He was arrested again a few days later and questioned about his *Risales*. After that, he and 120 of his students were sent in military vehicles to prison in Eskisehir. Said Nursi remained in prison during his trial for treason. The Eskisehir Criminal Court sentenced him to 11 months in prison and compulsory residence in Kastamonu; fifteen of his students were sentenced to six months each.

In 1943, while he was in Kastamonu under surveillance, he was again arrested on a warrant from the state prosecutor in Isparta. Although he was very ill, he was taken to Ankara and from there to Isparta by train. When the court cases regarding the *Risales* were combined with those in Denizli, Said Nursi was sent to Denizli. There, he was again isolated in a prison and lived under very difficult conditions. But during the trial, he continued to write the *Risales*. Later on in 1944, even after he had been acquitted, the government ordered Said Nursi to be put under house arrest in Emirdag (Afyon province).

There, he was placed in a room across the street from the government building and kept under observation. He was not even allowed to go to the mosque, and was constantly followed and watched. This exile was even worse than the one in Denizli. His opponents, who could not silence him legally, tried to poison him. Of the 23 attempts on his life, three occurred in Emirdag. But during these years, his students copied the *Risales*, both by hand and by machine, and so the message of the Qur'an was communicated to a wide audience.

In 1944, when the decision by the Denizli Criminal Court was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Appeals, Said Nursi was released. Every day that passed saw the

distribution of the *Risales* to the public, and this made the government very uneasy. In January 1948, Said Nursi and fifteen of his students were taken from their homes and workplaces and jailed in Afyon. Despite such difficult and trying conditions, Said Nursi continued to publish his works.

In December 1948, he was sentenced to 20 months in prison. On appeal, this sentence was overturned by the Supreme Court of Appeals. But despite this decree, the Criminal Court in Afyon extended the process for 20 months, all of which Said Nursi spent in prison. He was released in September 1949. But on an order from Ankara, he was held under house arrest in Afyon and was able to return to Emirdag only in December of the same year.

In 1951 in Emirdag and almost a year later in Istanbul, two more court cases were opened because of his *Genclik Rehberi* (A Guide for Youth). At the Istanbul hearing, the court brought the case to a conclusion in his favor. In January 1960, the police did not allow Said Nursi to go to Ankara. So, he went to Isparta. Now 83 and in very bad health, he and his students eventually went to Urfa. Although he was too ill to walk, the police nevertheless entered his hotel room on orders from the Minister of Internal Affairs to return him to Isparta. Under this oppression, Said Nursi died.

His Self-Sacrificial Character

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi dedicated his whole life and all of his possessions to winning Allah's approval, and always willingly undertook every act of self-sacrifice that was necessary. He endured circumstances that would have broken most people and was oppressed until the end of his life by those who feared his influence among the people. Brought before various courts several times, he spent about 30 years either in prison or in exile. And yet somehow during all of these trials he managed to complete the 6,000 page *Risale-i Nur Collection*.

Throughout his long life, he never once lost his faith or determination. His courage and patient trust in Allah, as well as his intelligence, perception, insight, mercy, compassion, and sincerity, make him an important example for all Muslims. He saw self-sacrifice as an absolutely necessary part of spreading the Qur'an's moral teachings and expected his students to be just as determined in fulfilling this responsibility: "*Yes, my brothers! An infinite resistance, levelheadedness, and an infinite self-sacrifice need to be borne at this time of such terrifying trends and events that will rock the world...*"

His students practiced the high moral qualities that they learned from him and were determined to spread the teachings of the Qur'an and the *Risales* through their own self-sacrificial acts and sincerity. Said Nursi and his students remain examples for all Muslims. Working together in a spirit of sincerity and self-sacrifice, they showed, with Allah's permission, that they could overcome all difficulties.

Writing the *Risale-i Nur*

When we look at the lives of Said Nursi and his students, we see how every difficulty can be overcome through cooperation, unity, and self-sacrifice. One of the difficulties that faced Said Nursi was writing the *Risale-i Nur Collection*, a book that has become a guide for many Muslims traveling the true path, under almost impossible conditions. Said Nursi disregarded whatever obstacles his enemies placed in his path in order to finish the *Risales*: exile, prison, while fighting on the front during World War I, and during his three years of captivity in a Siberian prison camp. His firm resolve to spread the Qur'an's message among the masses enabled him to persevere and be steadfast in self-sacrifice. In the lecture section of his *Buyuk Sozler* (The Big Words), we read:

*This situation of Bediuzzaman is an example to all those who strive for Islam and to all Muslims. In other words, he engages in struggle and service and taqwa [fear and respect of Allah] all together and does not perform one while ignoring another. His being cast into prison through the plans of ruthless and cruel enemies of religion, thrown into solitary confinement, kept in a freezing cold cell and suffering violent cold, the pains of illness, shivering, and the weaknesses stemming from old age did not stop him from writing his books.*⁵⁶

Hasan Akyol, one of his students imprisoned with him in Afyon, speaks of Said Nursi's determination to continue writing the *Risales* on whatever material he could find:

*He would constantly write, from evening until morning, on pieces of paper, notebooks, empty scraps of paper, small pocketbooks, and paper bags. Yet we did not read these as he wrote. He remained alone in the dormitory. That was where he did his writing. In the morning they opened the dormitory, and gave what he had written to forty-five of his students. From morning until evening, they would transcribe what he had written into their own notebooks. They could never finish it. I would sometimes join them and write like them.*⁵⁷

Tarihce-i Hayat (Bed. Said Nursi) tells of Said Nursi's self-sacrificial spirit:

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi is writing the Risale-i Nur collection under such difficult and adverse conditions that he is subjected to difficulties that no other scholar in history has ever been faced with. Yet since he possesses an unextinguished determination, will, and love of service, he is producing these extraordinary Risale-i Nur works, a great guide on the true path that is enlightening and will enlighten the world of Islam and all of humanity, and that will protect the nation and the country against the monster of communism, the aggression of Freemasonry and atheism, without being worn down, or tiring or losing heart, expending all of his great energies with an incomparable patience and fortitude, abandoning his earthly desires. The writing of the 130-part Risale-i Nur collection is coming to an end after 23 years. Since the Risales were written at a time of very great need, every treatise bears the

provisions of a most healthy antidote and medicine, and having such an effect cures a great many people of spiritual diseases.

Anyone who reads the Risale-i Nur will form the impression that it has been written just for him/her, and will reflect feeling a great enthusiasm and a strong need. Such works are emerging [from these writings] that Qur'anic truths that will suffice and respond to the requirements of all people of this and future centuries with regard to faith, Islam, the mind, the soul, the heart, and the intellect are being bestowed ...

One of his students relates Said Nursi's words about self-sacrifice:

One day he said this while speaking about self-sacrifice: "My current students are more self-sacrificing than those who sacrificed themselves by casting themselves into the fire in the east when fighting the Russians with me. This is because it is not easy to sacrifice an entire lifetime. If someone casts himself into the fire, he/she is at once martyred and dies. Long-term devotion and self-sacrifice, on the other hand, are not easy. For this reason, my current students are more self-sacrificing than the students of the Old Said. Whenever this secret appears in the east, my fellow citizens will perform great services for religion."

In *Son Sahitler* (The Last Witnesses), his students speak of their master's willing and determined self-sacrifice to communicate the Qur'an's moral teachings:

Whenever there arose an issue regarding the Qur'an and the Risales, the Master would assume the vigor of a youth of 25.

When we reached Barla, he ignored fatigue and illness. We never saw the Master unoccupied.⁶¹

We never saw the Master unoccupied during all of the long years that we were with him. He would either read or make corrections, or have others read and listen.⁶²

My brother, I congratulate you. Thanks to the Master we have become writers. Out of fear we had been unable to write works or to instruct anyone ... But his purity, affection, compassion, humility, courage, and heroism overcame all things.

Said Nursi Spread the Message under the Most Difficult Conditions

In spite of all these obstacles, Said Nursi never stopped spreading the teachings of the Qur'an through the *Risales*. To do this, he used the scant resources that he had at hand. No matter whether he was in exile, prison, or in a prison camp, and no matter where he went, he taught and wrote about Islam. New students continued to join him as the *Risales* reached more and more people.

While on the Caucasian front leading volunteer troops, he wrote his Arabic-language work *Al-Isarat al I'jaz* (The Signs of Miraculousness). During the three years he spent in the prison camp after the war, he was a source of spiritual knowledge for captured officers who spent their lives going from one front to another, and strengthened their belief and sincerity of heart. Later, the Russians allowed him to stay

in a mosque in the Tatar section of Kosturma (a mosque in Siberia). For two years and a half, he served as the mosque's imam and continued his discussions about belief. The book *Tarihce-i Hayat* (Bed. Said Nursi), which details the life of Said Nursi and his students, tells of his determined spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion whether in prison, exile, or a prison camp:

Bediuzzaman is a blessed person possessed of a most marvellous grace. Therefore, dungeons were like rose gardens for him, from where he saw the bright horizons of eternity. The executioner's block was a pulpit for him to preach and guide. From there he gave lessons of patience and perseverance, courage and strength for a sublime cause. Prisons turned into a Madrasa-i Yusufiya [School of Yusuf] for him. He would enter them like a professor entering a university to teach, because the people there were students in need of his inspiration and spiritual enlightenment. His daily activity of protecting several people's belief and turning monsters into angelic human beings was, for him, a happiness not to be exchanged for worlds.

We see from this that it was a sufficient reward for his troubles if only one person came to love belief. Through him, many people embraced the Qur'an's moral teachings:

He was thrown from one prison into another. Thanks to him, jails and prisons turned into a Madrasa-i Yusufiya [School of Yusuf]. Said Nursi illuminated jails, illuminated hearts. In the face of this monument to faith, many raging murderers and deviants were softened, as if they were re-created. All became gentle and good-tempered believers and good citizens ... Which of your schools or education systems has done or could do such things? They exiled him from one place to another. Every place of exile became his homeland. Wherever he went, wherever he was exiled, he was surrounded by pure, clean believers. Thick prison walls could not separate him from his brothers/sisters in religion. These material obstacles between the great teacher and his students became beautiful things, thanks to his religion, love, and belief. These restrictions and limitations imposed by brute force and dead matter caused great waves in the oceans of the soul's world. These waves began from village rooms and enfolded all places, as far as the university gates. The children of the country, whose holy things had been trampled on for years, the ruined generations, those thirsting for belief, ran to his path and his light. The Master's treatises were passed from hand to hand, tongue to tongue, province to province. Everyone, young or old, ignorant or learned, from eight to eighty, got something out of them and was illuminated by their light.

He Spread His Message while in Prison and Exile

Said Nursi was held in prison under very harsh conditions, sometimes being left in cold places, even when he was sick, and without anything to burn for warmth. While in prison and exile, 23 attempts were made to poison him. He was imprisoned with murderers and dangerous criminals, forbidden to speak with his students, and kept apart from all of his brothers in cause. But even under such difficult conditions, he

always thought first of other people's happiness and well-being both in this world and the Hereafter. He constantly called other people to belief and tried to get them to embrace the Qur'an's moral teachings.

Exile in Burdur, Isparta, and Barla

In 1925, Said Nursi was confined to compulsory residence in Burdur. In this house and at the local Kasaboglu mosque, he taught people the truths of religion and the Qur'an's moral teachings. However, the government at that time was uneasy with the number of people coming to listen to him and what he was teaching them, and so ordered him to be sent to Isparta. In 1926, he was transferred to Isparta and immediately involved himself in the same activities and attracted ever-growing crowds. In response, the government transferred him to Barla, a remote village located near Egirdir Lake that could only be reached by boat.

Barla was one of the oldest villages in Isparta province, and its population was composed mainly of old people, many of whom were not literate. Moreover, the young people had moved to the big cities for economic reasons. Thus, the government thought that it would be a most suitable place for keeping him away from the masses. Said Nursi did not consider these periods of exile, which became continuous, as exile, but instead saw it as his duty, despite the lack of suitable means, to continue working. In the room assigned to him by the villagers, he wrote several new works and converted many people to belief.

Eskisehir Prison

In Eskisehir prison, Said Nursi endured solitary confinement and, apart from one or two exceptions, was not allowed to speak to anyone. But despite these harsh conditions, he wrote sections 27 through 30 of *The Flashes* (a part of the *Risale-i Nur*).

Several sources give some examples of how he was mistreated:

Said Nursi was in the Eskisehir prison with 120 of his followers and had to endure solitary confinement. He and his students were subjected to various forms of cruelty and torture. One of his students, Zubeyir Gunduzalp, states that they were not given food for 12 days.

They were looking at us as if we had already been sentenced to death. No visitors were allowed. "You will be sentenced to death as well if you speak to them," they were threatened. At night, it was not possible to find sleep because of the filth, cockroaches, and bedbugs.

Denizli Prison

Said Nursi began his imprisonment in Denizli in seclusion, as in Eskisehir. But he continued to write the *Risale-i Nur* despite the difficult conditions and even during his trial. Moreover, through his students, some prisoners became acquainted with the

Risales. As a result, they became totally different individuals and began to perform their religious obligations. In this way, each prison in which Said Nursi spent time became a place where one could acquire spiritual knowledge.

Exile in Kastamonu

For the first month of his compulsory residence in Kastamonu, Said Nursi had to live on the top floor of the police station. Later on, he was moved to a house a few meters away. He was not allowed to close the curtains on the windows facing the police station. Even though he was oppressed in ways that were totally against the law, he did not interrupt his compilation of the *Risale-i Nur*.

In Kastamonu, he was able to take on new students. However, those who came to see him were questioned by the police, prevented from visiting him, and mistreated. And yet people continued to read the *Risale-i Nur* and to write and tell others about the signs leading to belief.

Exile in Emirdag

After Kastamonu, Said Nursi was taken to Emirdag and installed in a room opposite the government building. He was not allowed to go the mosque and was always followed and watched. The conditions there were even worse than those he had faced in Denizli prison. He was not allowed to have visitors and was almost poisoned three times. When his opponents saw that he could not be silenced by legal means, they sought to kill him. But each time, he was saved from death by Allah's help. As a result of these attempts, he suffered serious difficulties.

Afyon Prison

At the beginning of 1948, Said Nursi and 15 of his students were taken from their homes and workplaces and removed to Afyon's provincial center. They were held there for a week before being questioned, and then were sent to Afyon prison for the duration of their trials. As had happened before, they were mistreated. At this time, even though he was 70 years old and ill, he was left by himself in a dormitory big enough for 60 people. In spite of the ice on the broken windows on cold winter nights, he was not moved to other quarters. To make matters even worse, he was poisoned several times. On the pretext of protecting him from contagious diseases, the prison doctor injected him with a very strong poison that caused him to develop a dangerous fever. Despite his condition, he was left alone in the dormitory and forbidden to speak to anyone. His students in prison were not even allowed to visit him. However, they were able to turn the prison into a *madrassa* (religious school) where they taught the other inmates about the Qur'an and the *Risale-i Nur*. Some of the prisoners embraced belief in this way. In spite of his terrible living conditions, Said Nursi wrote the 14th and 15th parts of *The Rays*, thus completing the *Risale-i Nur's* compilation.

The following excerpts tell of Said Nursi's days in prison and the deliberate oppression and unjust treatment that he was forced to endure:

Then they arrested me during the most intensely cold days of winter on some trite pretext and put me into solitary confinement in a large and extremely cold prison ward, leaving me for two days without a stove. Having been accustomed to light my stove several times a day in my small room, and always having live coals in the brazier, due to my illness and weakness I was only able to endure it with difficulty. While struggling in this situation with both a fever from the cold and a dreadful degree of distress and anger, through Divine grace a truth unfolded in my heart. It uttered the following warning to my spirit: "You called prison the Medrese-i Yusufiya—the School of Prophet Yusuf. And while in Denizli, things like relief a thousand times greater than your distress, spiritual profit, and the other prisoners benefiting from the Risale-i Nur, and its conquests on a larger scale, all made you offer endless thanks instead of complaining. They made each hour of your imprisonment and hardship like ten hours' of worship, and made those passing hours eternal. Allah willing, those struck by calamity in this third 'School of Yusuf' are benefiting from the Risale-i Nur and finding consolation [in it] will heat this cold, severe distress of yours and transform it into joy."

Then, as though I had committed some heinous crime, they nailed up my windows. The smoke from the stove was a great discomfort to me, and I insisted that they leave one window open. Now they have nailed that up too. Also, although according to prison practice, solitary confinement usually lasts around a fortnight I was in total isolation for three and a half months, and they did not allow any of my friends to have any contact with me. Also, three months ago a forty-page indictment was written against me. They showed it to me. But I do not know the new letters, and I was ill, and my own writing is very poor, so I pleaded with them to let two of my students come, who know my language and could read the indictment and write out my objections to it. But they did not permit it. They said: "The defence lawyer should come and read it." Then they did not permit him [to do so] either. Only, they told one of my brothers to write it out in the old letters and give it to me. But it would take six or seven days to write out those forty pages. To make the hour's work of reading me the indictment stretch over six or seven days, just so that no one should have contact with me, is appalling repression and deprives me of my right of defence entirely. A multiple murderer condemned to be hanged does not receive such treatment.

But Said Nursi never regarded these difficulties as confining. He often expressed this attitude in his writings, some selections of which are presented here:

Since we have submitted to destiny, we know that these troubles are the most auspicious of matters and a spiritual blessing, the secret indicating the acquisition of merit. Generally, the end of transitory worldly troubles comes with well-being and goodness. Since we have such an elevated degree of belief and have dedicated our life to such a reality, it is brighter than the sun, as beautiful as Paradise, and as charming

as eternal happiness. Of course we are engaged in a spiritual struggle, taking pride in and giving thanks for these woes, and so must not complain.

Do they think I am so self-important and thinking of saving myself? I have sacrificed the world and the Hereafter for the sake of saving the congregation's belief. In my 80 or so years of life I have known nothing of worldly pleasure. My entire life has been spent on battlefields, in prison camps, or in the jails and court rooms of my country. There is no suffering or torment to which I have not been subjected. I have been treated like a monster by military courts, and exiled from place to place like a vagabond. I have been condemned to months of solitary confinement in the country's prisons. I have been poisoned many times, subjected to all forms of insult ... My nature cannot bear humiliation and insult. Islamic courage and reason forbid me from being in this state. When faced with such an incident, I will not belittle myself no matter with whom I may be dealing, be it even the cruellest, most barbaric enemy commander. I will strike him in the face with his cruelty and barbarity. He may throw me in a dungeon or even lead me to the executioner's block. It is of no importance. Indeed, that is what happened. I have seen all of these things. If the heart, the conscience, of that barbaric commander had been able to resist such cruelty a few minutes more, Said would today have been hanged and joined the assembly of the innocent. All my life has passed with such trouble and difficulty, disaster and catastrophe. I have sacrificed my self, my world, on the path of belief, happiness, and soundness of the society. So let it be. I do not even curse them, because thanks to this, the Risale-i Nur has at least reached a few hundred thousand people, or a few million. I do not know the number, but that is what they say. The Afyon prosecutor said five hundred thousand. Maybe it has been a means of saving more people's belief. By dying I would have saved only myself, but by remaining alive and bearing difficulty and troubles I have helped to save so much belief. A thousand thanks to Allah.

His students told about the difficulties he had experienced in those days and his resolve to be self-sacrificial while enduring them:

Winter. Everywhere was frozen. Afyon was cut off and the railway was closed. No food or fuel had reached the city for 15-20 days. No water flowed. The blessed Master's windows were broken, floorboards were spaced out, and it was impossible to get warm. That day I saw that the Master had curled up under a double blanket in front of a gas jar with some coal in it and a tea kettle.

Even if we met with the Master most times, it was impossible for us to know him as most of the other students know him. We sometimes became aware of him being kept in bitter cold, stoveless rooms, given deadly poisons. I saw the Master suffering—who knows after what torment and suffering? A strange day and a strange winter.⁷³

On the other hand, the aged and sick Bediuzzaman was regarded as worthy of all kinds of ruthless treatment. They would not even let him approach the window to take some air. Since the prison's water was on the bottom floor, they generally left the

Master without water. The Master was patient in the face of all this treatment and did not even curse them.

I sometimes entered the prison and visited the Master. At one visit, his temperature had risen to forty degrees [centigrade]. Even under those conditions he was busy with writing and rectification of texts. His disciples were at his side. They too had suffered much sickness.

The esteemed Master had genuinely suffered much. He saw Allah's grace in suffering. He was deprived of everything. The washing room was fifty meters away, with no roof and no electricity. During winter, sometimes there was no wood in the house. In Barla, everything was lacking in winter. He would have just a single egg by him and they made his bread locally. But the Master was nonetheless perfectly content.

I used to give Bediuzzaman his food. "You must not allow any books, pens, paper, or visitors in his room," they said. "All right," I said. He would divide the bread I had brought him into perhaps seventy pieces, taking some for himself and saying: "Ibrahim, my brother, take this to my students." I was sometimes quite amazed by this.

The Students Also Endured

Like Said Nursi, his students faced many difficulties and continued to sacrifice their interests to spread the Qur'an's moral teachings. We read in *The Words* that they memorized Said Nursi's words so that they could better spread his teachings. They were taken to prison along with Said Nursi and, while there, wrote down his words and then duplicated and distributed them.

If they had the secret means, they would again occupy themselves with the Risales. There were even some students who learned it by heart, saying: "I may be thrown into prison. They will not let me have the Risales, and I will be unable to study." One student of the Nur [Light], when removed from the prison, would draw closer to his Master and work and publish for the Nur even more than before, as if that prison with its whippings and beatings on the soles of the feet, full of torture of all kinds, had been a source of strength and energy, as if it had had a spurring effect in the service of the Nur with loyalty, care and cunning.

As their belief, dedication, determination, and self-sacrifice grew, the students described how they saw things:

The heroic Nur disciples of Emirdag were very loyal to our Master. They would have died for their Master. They performed much greater heroism, as if all of this oppression, threats, cruelty, and wickedness had not intimidated them. There came such a time that they imprisoned three brothers, together with their sons. Their shops remained closed for days, months; they caused them bankruptcy, but it was still a means whereby the nature of the lessons was understood. They would give their lives for the Master and the Risale-i Nur, along with their goods and possessions. They lost their property and went bankrupt, but never gave these a moment's thought.

The students adopted Said Nursi's moral understanding and faced their difficulties with patience and trust in Allah:

Such attacks on the Nur students who made progress and elevation in the levels of belief, and who attained a strong belief with the inquiring lessons in faith of the Risale-i Nur, are a test in one way and a means of measurement for distinguishing coal from diamonds. For the students of the Nur, prisons are all Madrasa-i Yusufiya due to their belief in Allah, obedience to the Prophet, and acting by the Qur'an. Cruelty and oppression are all whips and rivets [to urge us]. With these attacks, the Divine destiny reveals this to us: "Do not stop! Work!" For the Nur students, speaking in the courts in the service of the Qur'an and belief is like talking to a friend. Being taken to and from the police station is no different than going to and from the market ... Being cruelly sentenced by a person to punishment is a proof that Allah will acquit him in truth. All such cruelty and torture are medals of honor for students of the Nur. How happy are those brothers of ours, the students of the Nur, who have enjoyed those blessings for thirty years.

In one place, Said Nursi explains his students' devout and self-sacrificial moral character and urges them to accept whatever happens to them:

I have sacrificed all that I have, material and spiritual, and have borne all suffering and torture. Thanks to this, the truth of belief has spread everywhere. Thanks to this, the Risale-i Nur school has educated hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of students. They will now continue on this path of serving belief and will not depart from my profession of sacrificing everything, both material and spiritual. They will work solely to attain Allah's mercy inshaAllah [Allah willing]. Many of my students were exposed to various forms of suffering, torment, and torture along with me, and were sorely tested. Like me, I wish them to give up their rights in the face of all injustice and those who behaved unjustly, because this latter group, not being able to conceive of the secrets and manifestations of the Divine destiny, unknowingly served our cause and the spread of the truth of belief. Our duty consists solely of wishing them to be rightly guided.

CONCLUSION

As we have said from the beginning, self-sacrifice is a responsibility for every believer. This understanding requires that believers spend all of their material and spiritual assets to win Allah's approval and that they use their intelligence, conscience, and will to deal with whatever situation comes their way. Throughout their life, they will contend for goodness, be leaders in the Qur'an's morality and piety, be undaunted by any adversity, and call people to goodness and urge them to avoid evil.

Allah has made the believers responsible not only for refining their own moral character, but also for other people as well. To fulfill this responsibility in the best possible way, all believers who fear and respect Allah must work hard to develop a sincere, self-sacrificial moral character. To this end, they must support each other and cooperate among themselves in the face of every kind of hardship: **"Allah loves those who fight in His way in ranks like well-built walls"** (Surat as-Saff: 4). If they do not obey this command, there will be great disorder in the world: **"Those who do not believe are the friends and protectors of each other. If you do not act in this way, there will be turmoil in the land and great corruption"** (Surat al-Anfal: 73). This kind of help involves relieving the misery of those who are oppressed and treated with cruelty, as well as of destitute women, abandoned children, and anyone who needs help. Establishing the Qur'an's morality among all people will create universal peace and contentment, and will be the source of a great reward in Allah's sight for those believers who were instrumental in achieving this worthy goal.

In the Qur'an, Allah tells us: **"Race each other to forgiveness from your Lord and to a Garden, whose breadth is like that of heaven and Earth combined..."** (Surat al-Hadid: 21). Those who may hope for His mercy and for Paradise are those who have engaged in sincere self-sacrifice throughout their lives, sincerely sought Allah's approval, and have done their best in this endeavor. They know the Qur'an's moral teachings and what their conscience demands of them. Furthermore, they are aware that anyone who disregards these truths will endure inconsolable sorrow in the Hereafter.

One day, those who waste their lives pursuing selfish passions will enter the Hereafter. At that moment, they will want to return to this world and undertake acts of self-sacrifice for Allah's sake. They thought that avoiding self-sacrifice was to their advantage; but at that time, they will want to pawn everything that they had amassed to escape the pains of Hell:

As for those who do not believe, if they had everything on Earth and the same again with it to ransom themselves from the punishment of the Day of

Resurrection, it would not be accepted from them. They will have a painful punishment. (Surat al-Ma'ida: 36)

... An evildoer will wish he could ransom himself from the punishment of that Day, by means of his sons, his wife, his brother, or his family who sheltered him or everyone else on Earth, if that only meant that he could save himself. But no! It is a Raging Blaze. (Surat al-Ma'arij: 11-15)

These people will describe their sorrow as follows:

And that Day Hell is produced, that Day humanity will remember; but how will the remembrance help him? He will say: "Oh! If only I had prepared in advance for this life of mine!" (Surat al-Fajr: 23-24)

But as for those who are given their book in the left hand, they will say: "If only I had not been given my Book and had not known about my Reckoning! If only death had really been the end! My wealth has been of no use to me. My power has vanished." (Surat al-Haqqa: 25-29)

If only you could see when they are standing before the Fire and saying: "Oh! If only we could be sent back again, we would not deny the signs of our Lord and would be among the believers." (Surat al-An'am: 27)

In the span of time allotted for their life in this world, every person should think about these truths and avoid any moral weakness that might endanger his/her eternal life. Those who do not live the morality of Paradise in this world should fear that their next life will be filled with the eternal pain of Hell. However, it is very easy to escape this end and attain the blessings of Paradise, for: **"... Allah does not want to make things difficult for you; rather, He wants to purify you and perfect His blessing upon you so that, hopefully, you will be thankful"** (Surat al-Ma'ida: 6). Those believers who spend every moment trying to win Allah's approval have a good life in this world and the Hereafter, as well as His love, friendship, and help. In the Qur'an, He tells us that all good things are for the believers and that they will live forever in Paradise of incomparable beauty:

But the messenger and those who believe along with him have striven with their wealth and their selves. They are the people who will have the good things. They are the ones who are successful. Allah has prepared Gardens for them with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, forever. That is the great victory. (Surat at-Tawba: 88-89)

THE DECEPTION OF EVOLUTION

Darwinism, in other words the theory of evolution, was put forward with the aim of denying the fact of creation, but is in truth nothing but failed, unscientific nonsense. This theory, which claims that life emerged by chance from inanimate matter, was invalidated by the scientific evidence of clear “design” in the universe and in living things. In this way, science confirmed the fact that Allah created the universe and the living things in it. The propaganda carried out today in order to keep the theory of evolution alive is based solely on the distortion of the scientific facts, biased interpretation, and lies and falsehoods disguised as science.

Yet this propaganda cannot conceal the truth. The fact that the theory of evolution is the greatest deception in the history of science has been expressed more and more in the scientific world over the last 20-30 years. Research carried out after the 1980s in particular has revealed that the claims of Darwinism are totally unfounded, something that has been stated by a large number of scientists. In the United States in particular, many scientists from such different fields as biology, biochemistry and paleontology recognize the invalidity of Darwinism and employ the fact of creation to account for the origin of life.

We have examined the collapse of the theory of evolution and the proofs of creation in great scientific detail in many of our works, and are still continuing to do so. Given the enormous importance of this subject, it will be of great benefit to summarize it here.

The Scientific Collapse of Darwinism

Although this doctrine goes back as far as ancient Greece, the theory of evolution was advanced extensively in the nineteenth century. The most important development that made it the top topic of the world of science was Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859. In this book, he denied that Allah created different living species on Earth separately, for he claimed that all living beings had a common ancestor and had diversified over time through small changes. Darwin’s theory was not based on any concrete scientific finding; as he also accepted, it was just an “assumption.” Moreover, as Darwin confessed in the long chapter of his book titled “Difficulties on Theory,” the theory failed in the face of many critical questions.

Darwin invested all of his hopes in new scientific discoveries, which he expected to solve these difficulties. However, contrary to his expectations, scientific findings expanded the dimensions of these difficulties. The defeat of Darwinism in the face of science can be reviewed under three basic topics:

- 1) The theory cannot explain how life originated on Earth.

2) No scientific finding shows that the “evolutionary mechanisms” proposed by the theory have any evolutionary power at all.

3) The fossil record proves the exact opposite of what the theory suggests.

In this section, we will examine these three basic points in general outlines:

The First Insurmountable Step: The Origin of Life

The theory of evolution posits that all living species evolved from a single living cell that emerged on the primitive Earth 3.8 billion years ago. How a single cell could generate millions of complex living species and, if such an evolution really occurred, why traces of it cannot be observed in the fossil record are some of the questions that the theory cannot answer. However, first and foremost, we need to ask: How did this “first cell” originate?

Since the theory of evolution denies creation and any kind of supernatural intervention, it maintains that the “first cell” originated coincidentally within the laws of nature, without any design, plan or arrangement. According to the theory, inanimate matter must have produced a living cell as a result of coincidences. Such a claim, however, is inconsistent with the most unassailable rules of biology.

“Life Comes From Life”

In his book, Darwin never referred to the origin of life. The primitive understanding of science in his time rested on the assumption that living beings had a very simple structure. Since medieval times, spontaneous generation, which asserts that non-living materials came together to form living organisms, had been widely accepted. It was commonly believed that insects came into being from food leftovers, and mice from wheat. Interesting experiments were conducted to prove this theory. Some wheat was placed on a dirty piece of cloth, and it was believed that mice would originate from it after a while.

Similarly, maggots developing in rotting meat was assumed to be evidence of spontaneous generation. However, it was later understood that worms did not appear on meat spontaneously, but were carried there by flies in the form of larvae, invisible to the naked eye.

Even when Darwin wrote *The Origin of Species*, the belief that bacteria could come into existence from non-living matter was widely accepted in the world of science.

However, five years after the publication of Darwin’s book, Louis Pasteur announced his results after long studies and experiments, that disproved spontaneous generation, a cornerstone of Darwin’s theory. In his triumphal lecture at the Sorbonne in 1864, Pasteur said: “Never will the doctrine of spontaneous generation recover from the mortal blow struck by this simple experiment.”

For a long time, advocates of the theory of evolution resisted these findings. However, as the development of science unraveled the complex structure of the cell of a living being, the idea that life could come into being coincidentally faced an even greater impasse.

Inconclusive Efforts of the Twentieth Century

The first evolutionist who took up the subject of the origin of life in the twentieth century was the renowned Russian biologist Alexander Oparin. With various theses he advanced in the 1930s, he tried to prove that a living cell could originate by coincidence.

These studies, however, were doomed to failure, and Oparin had to make the following confession:

Unfortunately, however, the problem of the origin of the cell is perhaps the most obscure point in the whole study of the evolution of organisms.

Evolutionist followers of Oparin tried to carry out experiments to solve this problem. The best known experiment was carried out by the American chemist Stanley Miller in 1953. Combining the gases he alleged to have existed in the primordial Earth's atmosphere in an experiment set-up, and adding energy to the mixture, Miller synthesized several organic molecules (amino acids) present in the structure of proteins.

Barely a few years had passed before it was revealed that this experiment, which was then presented as an important step in the name of evolution, was invalid, for the atmosphere used in the experiment was very different from the real Earth conditions.

After a long silence, Miller confessed that the atmosphere medium he used was unrealistic.

All the evolutionists' efforts throughout the twentieth century to explain the origin of life ended in failure. The geochemist Jeffrey Bada, from the San Diego Scripps Institute accepts this fact in an article published in *Earth* magazine in 1998:

Today as we leave the twentieth century, we still face the biggest unsolved problem that we had when we entered the twentieth century: How did life originate on Earth?

The Complex Structure of Life

The primary reason why the theory of evolution ended up in such a great impasse regarding the origin of life is that even those living organisms deemed to be the simplest have incredibly complex structures. The cell of a living thing is more complex than all of our man-made technological products. Today, even in the most developed laboratories of the world, a living cell cannot be produced by bringing organic chemicals together.

The conditions required for the formation of a cell are too great in quantity to be explained away by coincidences. The probability of proteins, the building blocks of a cell, being synthesized coincidentally, is 1 in 10^{950} for an average protein made up of 500 amino acids. In mathematics, a probability smaller than 1 over 10^{50} is considered to be impossible in practical terms.

The DNA molecule, which is located in the nucleus of a cell and which stores genetic information, is an incredible databank. If the information coded in DNA were

written down, it would make a giant library consisting of an estimated 900 volumes of encyclopedias consisting of 500 pages each.

A very interesting dilemma emerges at this point: DNA can replicate itself only with the help of some specialized proteins (enzymes). However, the synthesis of these enzymes can be realized only by the information coded in DNA. As they both depend on each other, they have to exist at the same time for replication. This brings the scenario that life originated by itself to a deadlock. Prof. Leslie Orgel, an evolutionist of repute from the University of San Diego, California, confesses this fact in the September 1994 issue of the *Scientific American* magazine:

It is extremely improbable that proteins and nucleic acids, both of which are structurally complex, arose spontaneously in the same place at the same time. Yet it also seems impossible to have one without the other. And so, at first glance, one might have to conclude that life could never, in fact, have originated by chemical means.⁸⁷

No doubt, if it is impossible for life to have originated from natural causes, then it has to be accepted that life was “created” in a supernatural way. This fact explicitly invalidates the theory of evolution, whose main purpose is to deny creation.

Imaginary Mechanism of Evolution

The second important point that negates Darwin's theory is that both concepts put forward by the theory as "evolutionary mechanisms" were understood to have, in reality, no evolutionary power.

Darwin based his evolution allegation entirely on the mechanism of "natural selection." The importance he placed on this mechanism was evident in the name of his book: *The Origin of Species, By Means of Natural Selection...*

Natural selection holds that those living things that are stronger and more suited to the natural conditions of their habitats will survive in the struggle for life. For example, in a deer herd under the threat of attack by wild animals, those that can run faster will survive. Therefore, the deer herd will be comprised of faster and stronger individuals. However, unquestionably, this mechanism will not cause deer to evolve and transform themselves into another living species, for instance, horses.

Therefore, the mechanism of natural selection has no evolutionary power. Darwin was also aware of this fact and had to state this in his book *The Origin of Species*:

Natural selection can do nothing until favourable individual differences or variations occur.

Lamarck's Impact

So, how could these "favorable variations" occur? Darwin tried to answer this question from the standpoint of the primitive understanding of science at that time. According to the French biologist Chevalier de Lamarck (1744-1829), who lived before Darwin, living creatures passed on the traits they acquired during their lifetime to the next generation. He asserted that these traits, which accumulated from one generation to another, caused new species to be formed. For instance, he claimed that giraffes evolved from antelopes; as they struggled to eat the leaves of high trees, their necks were extended from generation to generation.

Darwin also gave similar examples. In his book *The Origin of Species*, for instance, he said that some bears going into water to find food transformed themselves into whales over time.

However, the laws of inheritance discovered by Gregor Mendel (1822-84) and verified by the science of genetics, which flourished in the twentieth century, utterly demolished the legend that acquired traits were passed on to subsequent generations. Thus, natural selection fell out of favor as an evolutionary mechanism.

Neo-Darwinism and Mutations

In order to find a solution, Darwinists advanced the "Modern Synthetic Theory," or as it is more commonly known, Neo-Darwinism, at the end of the 1930s. Neo-Darwinism added mutations, which are distortions formed in the genes of living beings due to such

external factors as radiation or replication errors, as the “cause of favorable variations” in addition to natural mutation.

Today, the model that stands for evolution in the world is Neo-Darwinism. The theory maintains that millions of living beings formed as a result of a process whereby numerous complex organs of these organisms (e.g., ears, eyes, lungs, and wings) underwent “mutations,” that is, genetic disorders. Yet, there is an outright scientific fact that totally undermines this theory: Mutations do not cause living beings to develop; on the contrary, they are always harmful.

The reason for this is very simple: DNA has a very complex structure, and random effects can only harm it. The American geneticist B. G. Ranganathan explains this as follows:

First, genuine mutations are very rare in nature. Secondly, most mutations are harmful since they are random, rather than orderly changes in the structure of genes; any random change in a highly ordered system will be for the worse, not for the better. For example, if an earthquake were to shake a highly ordered structure such as a building, there would be a random change in the framework of the building which, in all probability, would not be an improvement.

Not surprisingly, no mutation example, which is useful, that is, which is observed to develop the genetic code, has been observed so far. All mutations have proved to be harmful. It was understood that mutation, which is presented as an “evolutionary mechanism,” is actually a genetic occurrence that harms living things, and leaves them disabled. (The most common effect of mutation on human beings is cancer.) Of course, a destructive mechanism cannot be an “evolutionary mechanism.” Natural selection, on the other hand, “can do nothing by itself,” as Darwin also accepted. This fact shows us that there is no “evolutionary mechanism” in nature. Since no evolutionary mechanism exists, no such any imaginary process called “evolution” could have taken place.

The Fossil Record: No Sign of Intermediate Forms

The clearest evidence that the scenario suggested by the theory of evolution did not take place is the fossil record.

According to this theory, every living species has sprung from a predecessor. A previously existing species turned into something else over time and all species have come into being in this way. In other words, this transformation proceeds gradually over millions of years.

Had this been the case, numerous intermediary species should have existed and lived within this long transformation period.

For instance, some half-fish/half-reptiles should have lived in the past which had acquired some reptilian traits in addition to the fish traits they already had. Or there should have existed some reptile-birds, which acquired some bird traits in addition to

the reptilian traits they already had. Since these would be in a transitional phase, they should be disabled, defective, crippled living beings. Evolutionists refer to these imaginary creatures, which they believe to have lived in the past, as “transitional forms.”

If such animals ever really existed, there should be millions and even billions of them in number and variety. More importantly, the remains of these strange creatures should be present in the fossil record. In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin explained:

If my theory be true, numberless intermediate varieties, linking most closely all of the species of the same group together must assuredly have existed... Consequently, evidence of their former existence could be found only amongst fossil remains.

Darwin's Hopes Shattered

However, although evolutionists have been making strenuous efforts to find fossils since the middle of the nineteenth century all over the world, no transitional forms have yet been uncovered. All of the fossils, contrary to the evolutionists' expectations, show that life appeared on Earth all of a sudden and fully-formed.

One famous British paleontologist, Derek V. Ager, admits this fact, even though he is an evolutionist:

The point emerges that if we examine the fossil record in detail, whether at the level of orders or of species, we find – over and over again – not gradual evolution, but the sudden explosion of one group at the expense of another.

This means that in the fossil record, all living species suddenly emerge as fully formed, without any intermediate forms in between. This is just the opposite of Darwin's assumptions. Also, this is very strong evidence that all living things are created. The only explanation of a living species emerging suddenly and complete in every detail without any evolutionary ancestor is that it was created. This fact is admitted also by the widely known evolutionist biologist Douglas Futuyma:

Creation and evolution, between them, exhaust the possible explanations for the origin of living things. Organisms either appeared on the earth fully developed or they did not. If they did not, they must have developed from pre-existing species by some process of modification. If they did appear in a fully developed state, they must indeed have been created by some omnipotent intelligence.

Fossils show that living beings emerged fully developed and in a perfect state on the Earth. That means that “the origin of species,” contrary to Darwin's supposition, is not evolution, but creation.

The Tale of Human Evolution

The subject most often brought up by advocates of the theory of evolution is the subject of the origin of man. The Darwinist claim holds that modern man evolved from ape-like creatures. During this alleged evolutionary process, which is supposed to have

started 4-5 million years ago, some “transitional forms” between modern man and his ancestors are supposed to have existed. According to this completely imaginary scenario, four basic “categories” are listed:

1. *Australopithecus*
2. *Homo habilis*
3. *Homo erectus*
4. *Homo sapiens*

Evolutionists call man’s so-called first ape-like ancestors *Australopithecus*, which means “South African ape.” These living beings are actually nothing but an old ape species that has become extinct. Extensive research done on various *Australopithecus* specimens by two world famous anatomists from England and the USA, namely, Lord Solly Zuckerman and Prof. Charles Oxnard, shows that these apes belonged to an ordinary ape species that became extinct and bore no resemblance to humans.

Evolutionists classify the next stage of human evolution as “homo,” that is “man.” According to their claim, the living beings in the *Homo* series are more developed than *Australopithecus*. Evolutionists devise a fanciful evolution scheme by arranging different fossils of these creatures in a particular order. This scheme is imaginary because it has never been proved that there is an evolutionary relation between these different classes. Ernst Mayr, one of the twentieth century’s most important evolutionists, contends in his book *One Long Argument* that “particularly historical [puzzles] such as the origin of life or of *Homo sapiens*, are extremely difficult and may even resist a final, satisfying explanation.”

By outlining the link chain as *Australopithecus* > *Homo habilis* > *Homo erectus* > *Homo sapiens*, evolutionists imply that each of these species is one another’s ancestor. However, recent findings of paleoanthropologists have revealed that *Australopithecus*, *Homo habilis*, and *Homo erectus* lived at different parts of the world at the same time.

Moreover, a certain segment of humans classified as *Homo erectus* have lived up until very modern times. *Homo sapiens neandarthalsensis* and *Homo sapiens sapiens* (modern man) co-existed in the same region.

This situation apparently indicates the invalidity of the claim that they are ancestors of one another. Stephen Jay Gould explained this deadlock of the theory of evolution, although he was himself one of the leading advocates of evolution in the twentieth century:

What has become of our ladder if there are three coexisting lineages of hominids (*A. africanus*, the robust australopithecines, and *H. habilis*), none clearly derived from another? Moreover, none of the three display any evolutionary trends during their tenure on earth.

Put briefly, the scenario of human evolution, which is “upheld” with the help of various drawings of some “half ape, half human” creatures appearing in the media and

course books, that is, frankly, by means of propaganda, is nothing but a tale with no scientific foundation.

Lord Solly Zuckerman, one of the most famous and respected scientists in the U.K., who carried out research on this subject for years and studied *Australopithecus* fossils for 15 years, finally concluded, despite being an evolutionist himself, that there is, in fact, no such family tree branching out from ape-like creatures to man.

Zuckerman also made an interesting “spectrum of science” ranging from those he considered scientific to those he considered unscientific. According to Zuckerman’s spectrum, the most “scientific”—that is, depending on concrete data—fields of science are chemistry and physics. After them come the biological sciences and then the social sciences. At the far end of the spectrum, which is the part considered to be most “unscientific,” are “extra-sensory perception”—concepts such as telepathy and sixth sense—and finally “human evolution.” Zuckerman explains his reasoning:

We then move right off the register of objective truth into those fields of presumed biological science, like extrasensory perception or the interpretation of man’s fossil history, where to the faithful [evolutionist] anything is possible – and where the ardent believer [in evolution] is sometimes able to believe several contradictory things at the same time.⁹⁹

The tale of human evolution boils down to nothing but the prejudiced interpretations of some fossils unearthed by certain people, who blindly adhere to their theory.

Darwinian Formula!

Besides all the technical evidence we have dealt with so far, let us now for once, examine what kind of a superstition the evolutionists have with an example so simple as to be understood even by children:

The theory of evolution asserts that life is formed by chance. According to this claim, lifeless and unconscious atoms came together to form the cell and then they somehow formed other living things, including man. Let us think about that. When we bring together the elements that are the building-blocks of life such as carbon, phosphorus, nitrogen and potassium, only a heap is formed. No matter what treatments it undergoes, this atomic heap cannot form even a single living being. If you like, let us formulate an “experiment” on this subject and let us examine on the behalf of evolutionists what they really claim without pronouncing loudly under the name “Darwinian formula”:

Let evolutionists put plenty of materials present in the composition of living things such as phosphorus, nitrogen, carbon, oxygen, iron, and magnesium into big barrels. Moreover, let them add in these barrels any material that does not exist under normal conditions, but they think as necessary. Let them add in this mixture as many amino acids and as many proteins—a single one of which has a formation probability of 10^{-950}

—as they like. Let them expose these mixtures to as much heat and moisture as they like. Let them stir these with whatever technologically developed device they like. Let them put the foremost scientists beside these barrels. Let these experts wait in turn beside these barrels for billions, and even trillions of years. Let them be free to use all kinds of conditions they believe to be necessary for a human's formation. No matter what they do, they cannot produce from these barrels a human, say a professor that examines his cell structure under the electron microscope. They cannot produce giraffes, lions, bees, canaries, horses, dolphins, roses, orchids, lilies, carnations, bananas, oranges, apples, dates, tomatoes, melons, watermelons, figs, olives, grapes, peaches, peafowls, pheasants, multicolored butterflies, or millions of other living beings such as these. Indeed, they could not obtain even a single cell of any one of them.

Briefly, unconscious atoms cannot form the cell by coming together. They cannot take a new decision and divide this cell into two, then take other decisions and create the professors who first invent the electron microscope and then examine their own cell structure under that microscope. Matter is an unconscious, lifeless heap, and it comes to life with Allah's superior creation.

The theory of evolution, which claims the opposite, is a total fallacy completely contrary to reason. Thinking even a little bit on the claims of evolutionists discloses this reality, just as in the above example.

Technology in the Eye and the Ear

Another subject that remains unanswered by evolutionary theory is the excellent quality of perception in the eye and the ear.

Before passing on to the subject of the eye, let us briefly answer the question of how we see. Light rays coming from an object fall oppositely on the eye's retina. Here, these light rays are transmitted into electric signals by cells and reach a tiny spot at the back of the brain, the "center of vision." These electric signals are perceived in this center as an image after a series of processes. With this technical background, let us do some thinking.

The brain is insulated from light. That means that its inside is completely dark, and that no light reaches the place where it is located. Thus, the "center of vision" is never touched by light and may even be the darkest place you have ever known. However, you observe a luminous, bright world in this pitch darkness.

The image formed in the eye is so sharp and distinct that even the technology of the twentieth century has not been able to attain it. For instance, look at the book you are reading, your hands with which you are holding it, and then lift your head and look around you. Have you ever seen such a sharp and distinct image as this one at any other place? Even the most developed television screen produced by the greatest television producer in the world cannot provide such a sharp image for you. This is a three-dimensional, colored, and extremely sharp image. For more than 100 years,

thousands of engineers have been trying to achieve this sharpness. Factories, huge premises were established, much research has been done, plans and designs have been made for this purpose. Again, look at a TV screen and the book you hold in your hands. You will see that there is a big difference in sharpness and distinction. Moreover, the TV screen shows you a two-dimensional image, whereas with your eyes, you watch a three-dimensional perspective with depth.

For many years, tens of thousands of engineers have tried to make a three-dimensional TV and achieve the vision quality of the eye. Yes, they have made a three-dimensional television system, but it is not possible to watch it without putting on special 3-D glasses; moreover, it is only an artificial three-dimension. The background is more blurred, the foreground appears like a paper setting. Never has it been possible to produce a sharp and distinct vision like that of the eye. In both the camera and the television, there is a loss of image quality.

Evolutionists claim that the mechanism producing this sharp and distinct image has been formed by chance. Now, if somebody told you that the television in your room was formed as a result of chance, that all of its atoms just happened to come together and make up this device that produces an image, what would you think? How can atoms do what thousands of people cannot?

If a device producing a more primitive image than the eye could not have been formed by chance, then it is very evident that the eye and the image seen by the eye could not have been formed by chance. The same situation applies to the ear. The outer ear picks up the available sounds by the auricle and directs them to the middle ear, the middle ear transmits the sound vibrations by intensifying them, and the inner ear sends these vibrations to the brain by translating them into electric signals. Just as with the eye, the act of hearing finalizes in the center of hearing in the brain.

The situation in the eye is also true for the ear. That is, the brain is insulated from sound just as it is from light. It does not let any sound in. Therefore, no matter how noisy is the outside, the inside of the brain is completely silent. Nevertheless, the sharpest sounds are perceived in the brain. In your completely silent brain, you listen to symphonies, and hear all of the noises in a crowded place. However, were the sound level in your brain measured by a precise device at that moment, complete silence would be found to be prevailing there.

As is the case with imagery, decades of effort have been spent in trying to generate and reproduce sound that is faithful to the original. The results of these efforts are sound recorders, high-fidelity systems, and systems for sensing sound. Despite all of this technology and the thousands of engineers and experts who have been working on this endeavor, no sound has yet been obtained that has the same sharpness and clarity as the sound perceived by the ear. Think of the highest-quality hi-fi systems produced by the largest company in the music industry. Even in these devices, when sound is recorded some of it is lost; or when you turn on a hi-fi you always hear a hissing sound

before the music starts. However, the sounds that are the products of the human body's technology are extremely sharp and clear. A human ear never perceives a sound accompanied by a hissing sound or with atmospherics as does a hi-fi; rather, it perceives sound exactly as it is, sharp and clear. This is the way it has been since the creation of man.

So far, no man-made visual or recording apparatus has been as sensitive and successful in perceiving sensory data as are the eye and the ear. However, as far as seeing and hearing are concerned, a far greater truth lies beyond all this.

To Whom Does the Consciousness that Sees and Hears within the Brain Belong?

Who watches an alluring world in the brain, listens to symphonies and the twittering of birds, and smells the rose?

The stimulations coming from a person's eyes, ears, and nose travel to the brain as electro-chemical nerve impulses. In biology, physiology, and biochemistry books, you can find many details about how this image forms in the brain. However, you will never come across the most important fact: Who perceives these electro-chemical nerve impulses as images, sounds, odors, and sensory events in the brain? There is a consciousness in the brain that perceives all this without feeling any need for an eye, an ear, and a nose. To whom does this consciousness belong? Of course it does not belong to the nerves, the fat layer, and neurons comprising the brain. This is why Darwinist-materialists, who believe that everything is comprised of matter, cannot answer these questions.

For this consciousness is the spirit created by Allah, which needs neither the eye to watch the images nor the ear to hear the sounds. Furthermore, it does not need the brain to think.

Everyone who reads this explicit and scientific fact should ponder on Almighty Allah, and fear and seek refuge in Him, for He squeezes the entire universe in a pitch-dark place of a few cubic centimeters in a three-dimensional, colored, shadowy, and luminous form.

A Materialist Faith

The information we have presented so far shows us that the theory of evolution is incompatible with scientific findings. The theory's claim regarding the origin of life is inconsistent with science, the evolutionary mechanisms it proposes have no evolutionary power, and fossils demonstrate that the required intermediate forms have never existed. So, it certainly follows that the theory of evolution should be pushed aside as an unscientific idea. This is how many ideas, such as the Earth-centered universe model, have been taken out of the agenda of science throughout history.

However, the theory of evolution is kept on the agenda of science. Some people even try to represent criticisms directed against it as an “attack on science.” Why?

The reason is that this theory is an indispensable dogmatic belief for some circles. These circles are blindly devoted to materialist philosophy and adopt Darwinism because it is the only materialist explanation that can be put forward to explain the workings of nature.

Interestingly enough, they also confess this fact from time to time. A well-known geneticist and an outspoken evolutionist, Richard C. Lewontin from Harvard University, confesses that he is “first and foremost a materialist and then a scientist”:

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, so we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.

These are explicit statements that Darwinism is a dogma kept alive just for the sake of adherence to materialism. This dogma maintains that there is no being save matter. Therefore, it argues that inanimate, unconscious matter created life. It insists that millions of different living species (e.g., birds, fish, giraffes, tigers, insects, trees, flowers, whales, and human beings) originated as a result of the interactions between matter such as pouring rain, lightning flashes, and so on, out of inanimate matter. This is a precept contrary both to reason and science. Yet Darwinists continue to defend it just so as “not to allow a Divine Foot in the door.”

Anyone who does not look at the origin of living beings with a materialist prejudice will see this evident truth: All living beings are works of a Creator, Who is All-Powerful, All-Wise, and All-Knowing. This Creator is Allah, Who created the whole universe from non-existence, designed it in the most perfect form, and fashioned all living beings.

The Theory of Evolution: The Most Potent Spell in the World

Anyone free of prejudice and the influence of any particular ideology, who uses only his or her reason and logic, will clearly understand that belief in the theory of evolution, which brings to mind the superstitions of societies with no knowledge of science or civilization, is quite impossible.

As explained above, those who believe in the theory of evolution think that a few atoms and molecules thrown into a huge vat could produce thinking, reasoning professors and university students; such scientists as Einstein and Galileo; such artists as Humphrey Bogart, Frank Sinatra and Luciano Pavarotti; as well as antelopes, lemon trees, and carnations. Moreover, as the scientists and professors who believe in this nonsense are educated people, it is quite justifiable to speak of this theory as “the most

potent spell in history.” Never before has any other belief or idea so taken away peoples’ powers of reason, refused to allow them to think intelligently and logically, and hidden the truth from them as if they had been blindfolded. This is an even worse and unbelievable blindness than the Egyptians worshipping the false Sun god Ra, totem worship in some parts of Africa, the people of Saba worshipping the Sun, the tribe of Prophet Ibrahim (as) worshipping idols they had made with their own hands, or the people of Prophet Musa (as) worshipping the Golden Calf.

In fact, Allah has pointed to this lack of reason in the Qur’an. In many verses, He reveals that some peoples’ minds will be closed and that they will be powerless to see the truth. Some of these verses are as follows:

As for those who do not believe, it makes no difference to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe. Allah has sealed up their hearts and hearing and over their eyes is a blindfold. They will have a terrible punishment. (Surat al-Baqara: 6-7)

... They have hearts with which they do not understand. They have eyes with which they do not see. They have ears with which they do not hear. Such people are like cattle. No, they are even further astray! They are the unaware. (Surat al-A’raf: 179)

Even if We opened up to them a door into heaven, and they spent the day ascending through it, they would only say: “Our eyesight is befuddled! Or rather we have been put under a spell!” (Surat al-Hijr: 14-15)

Words cannot express just how astonishing it is that this spell should hold such a wide community in thrall, keep people from the truth, and not be broken for 150 years. It is understandable that one or a few people might believe in impossible scenarios and claims full of stupidity and illogicality. However, “magic” is the only possible explanation for people from all over the world believing that unconscious and lifeless atoms suddenly decided to come together and form a universe that functions with a flawless system of organization, discipline, reason, and consciousness; a planet named Earth with all of its features so perfectly suited to life; and living things full of countless complex systems.

In fact, the Qur’an relates the incident of Prophet Musa (as) and Pharaoh to show that some people who support atheistic philosophies actually influence others by magic. When Pharaoh was told about the true religion, he told Prophet Musa (as) to meet with his own magicians. When Musa (as) did so, he told them to demonstrate their abilities first. The verses continue:

He said: “You throw.” And when they threw, they cast a spell on the people’s eyes and caused them to feel great fear of them. They produced an extremely powerful magic. (Surat al-A’raf: 116)

As we have seen, Pharaoh’s magicians were able to deceive everyone, apart from Musa (as) and those who believed in him. However, his evidence broke the spell, or “swallowed up what they had forged,” as the verse puts it:

We revealed to Musa: “Throw down your staff.” And it immediately swallowed up what they had forged. So the Truth took place and what they did was shown to be false. (Surat al-A’raf: 117-118)

As we can see, when people realized that a spell had been cast upon them and that what they saw was just an illusion, Pharaoh’s magicians lost all credibility. In the present day too, unless those who, under the influence of a similar spell, believe in these ridiculous claims under their scientific disguise and spend their lives defending them, abandon their superstitious beliefs, they also will be humiliated when the full truth emerges and the spell is broken. In fact, world-renowned British writer and philosopher Malcolm Muggeridge, who was an atheist defending evolution for some 60 years, but who subsequently realized the truth, reveals the position in which the theory of evolution would find itself in the near future in these terms:

I myself am convinced that the theory of evolution, especially the extent to which it’s been applied, will be one of the great jokes in the history books in the future. Posterity will marvel that so very flimsy and dubious an hypothesis could be accepted with the incredible credulity that it has.

That future is not far off: On the contrary, people will soon see that “chance” is not a deity, and will look back on the theory of evolution as the worst deceit and the most terrible spell in the world. That spell is already rapidly beginning to be lifted from the shoulders of people all over the world. Many people who see its true face are wondering with amazement how they could ever have been taken in by it.

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**The Qur'an reveals a very important truth: "You will not attain true goodness until you give of what you love."
(Surah Al 'Imran: 92)**

Self-sacrifice, one of the basic moral qualities that allows people to attain real goodness, can enable individuals to give up, happily and without a second thought, all that they own, love, and value.

All people are created with negative moral tendencies that direct them toward selfishness and egotism. If one's lower self is not trained, this selfishness will take control of one's moral character. However, people can overcome their lower self by understanding belief in Allah and practicing the Qur'an's moral teachings.

This book examines the nature of self-sacrifice from all angles. You will see for yourself that self-sacrifice is a moral virtue that must dominate a believer's life and that it must be lived in its totality to win Allah's favor.

About the Author

The author, who writes under the pen-name Harun Yahya, was born in Ankara in 1956. He studied arts at Istanbul's Mimar Sinan University, and philosophy at Istanbul University. Since the 1980s, the author has published many books on political, faith-related and scientific issues. Greatly appreciated all around the world, these works have been instrumental in helping many to return their faith in Allah, and, in many others, to gain a deeper insight into their faith. Harun Yahya's books appeal to all kinds of readers, regardless of their age, race, or nationality, for they focus on one objective: to broaden the reader's perspective by encouraging him or her to think about a number of critical issues, such as the existence of Allah and His unity, and to live by the values He prescribed for them.